Interview with Anna Romanski

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

ANNA ROMANSKI

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Today is the eleventh of May 2006. This is an interview with Anna Romanski. This first part is to make up for a blank tape that was done. Something happened in our regular interview. Anna, could you tell me when and where you were born and a little bit about the Romanski family?

ROMANSKI: I was born in England in 1947. My parents were Polish refugees. The Romanski side of the family came from a town called Tarnopol, which had been part of Poland but is now located in the Ukraine. It's not very far from the Ukrainian capital city which the Poles call Lvov. To the Ukrainians, it's Lviv. After the dislocations of World War II, however, most of the family ended up in Katowice, which is located in the industrial south of Poland, a coal mining region.

Q: On your mother's side, where did they come from?

ROMANSKI: My mother's side of the family came from a little town called Golina and Warta near the larger city of Poznan, about midway between Warsaw and Berlin, i.e. about a four hour drive from each (at least it was in those days).

Q: What did you hear from your parents about why they got out? I assume the name Romanski is Polish. So many refugees are coming out because...who were able to get out were coming from the Pale, from the Jewish side. Your parents were pure Polish.

ROMANSKI: Right. My father's side of the family left because, in the dislocations of war, they were displaced. As a result of World War II, Poland acquired lands to the west that were formerly in Germany but lost lands in the east. Boundaries change. That part of Poland was no longer in Poland, so there was no point in trying to go back. I think maybe now one could try to make a claim but, at that time, one couldn't. I don't know what kind of documentation my father would have had in any case. My mother's sister had emigrated to the United States by marrying an American soldier, so we had family ties in the U. S. Basically, my aunt brought us over.

Q: Where did you grow up?

ROMANSKI: Except for four years in England, which I largely don't remember, I grew up in New Jersey.

Q: Where in New Jersey?

ROMANSKI: Belford, New Jersey, which is not far from the Atlantic Ocean near Asbury Park, about 40 miles south of New York City.

Q: What sort of place was this?

ROMANSKI: It was a typical suburb — not very exciting.

Q: What were your father and mother doing when you got to New Jersey?

ROMANSKI: My father became a factory worker. My mother initially was not employed. I have two younger brothers and a sister so she stayed home with the kids. Eventually, she started working in stores as a clerk or similar types of employment.

Q: Were you growing up in what amounted to a Polish neighborhood or a mixed neighborhood? What was it like?

ROMANSKI: No, it was not at all a Polish neighborhood. There are some Polish neighborhoods in Northern New Jersey. Not very far from where we lived, in Perth Amboy, I think there was quite a large Polish community. Nonetheless, we were off on our own because that's where we had happened to land. I did grow up speaking some Polish, because I was the eldest child. I remembered enough Polish so that I could speak with my mother, aunt and father. Once the children started to go to school, our family switched to English so that my parents could learn the language to help their employment prospects. They used us as informal tutors.

Q: I take it that fairly soon you didn't feel that you were growing up in a Polish household.

ROMANSKI: That's right. Even when I was in elementary school, we didn't feel very Polish except that I would often spend summers with my aunt who lived in Washington, D. C. She insisted that I retain my Polish because she claimed it would come in very handy. She would insist on speaking Polish with me. As a result, I retained my Polish. The rest of my siblings didn't. Despite the “Americanization” of our family, we did of course retain traditions, generally centering around holidays such as Christmas and Easter.

Q: Was there any sort of feeling about Free Poland and that sort of thing?

ROMANSKI: Certainly on the part of my aunt, there was. She was a great Polish patriot. That was one of the reasons why she insisted that I learn Polish. As you know, Poland is one of the countries where the diaspora, by which I mean Poles living in parts of the world outside of Poland, was very important in maintaining the identity of Poland: Polish culture,

Polish language, Polish civilization. My aunt would bring up the elephant and the Polish question. That is to say, she would raise Poland at any occasion whether appropriate or not. Had her feelings been less strong, I probably wouldn't have ended up speaking Polish. I have retained some fluency in Polish even to this day, although I never have occasion to speak it.

Q: How did you find elementary school and earlier even. How did you take to education?

ROMANSKI: I was a good student. I enjoyed learning. School was fun initially. It got tougher in high school, but I was always studious so I did quite well academically.

Q: How about reading?

ROMANSKI: I liked reading very much. I read a lot, but not as much, I'm sure, as a lot of other future officers.

Q: Can you think of any sort of books that you particularly liked as a kid?

ROMANSKI: I can't, really. I can't think of anything that was particularly influential, especially not in terms of choosing a career in the Foreign Service.

Q: What was your school like, and what is the name of it?

ROMANSKI: My family moved a few times so I attended several public elementary schools. If you are referring to high school, I attended Middletown Township High School. At that time, there was only one high school for the entire township. In my part of the state, New Jersey is organized in a township system, where small towns join up to form townships. When I attended, it was quite a large high school with a variety of programs, catering to a fairly large population. I can't remember the size of the high school, but I do remember that there were 702 persons in my high school graduating class. I remember

because I graduated second in my class. My aunt was always disappointed that I hadn't graduated first, but I thought I had done quite well just to get that far.

Q: Throughout your schooling, before we get to college, what sort of courses particularly turned you on and didn't turn you on?

ROMANSKI: I always liked languages. Our high school at that time was quite large. We were still feeling the effect of the Soviet Sputnik launch, so I started taking Russian in high school. They had just started the program so I had a couple of years of Russian in high school. I also took Latin because the guidance counselor insisted that one couldn't learn a foreign language if one hadn't studied Latin. That, of course, was not true; but it turned out to be quite useful nonetheless, because we had never been taught grammar in English class. Grammar was not fashionable in those days, but it was worth learning even if Latin wasn't particularly useful. I also learned French. The other courses that I liked were English and history. The courses I didn't particularly like were math and typing, both of which I had to take for college prep.

Q: At home, I assume your family was Catholic, is this right?

ROMANSKI: That is correct.

Q: How Catholic was your family?

ROMANSKI: I would say that we were regular church goers but not tremendously devout. We never fasted during Lent for example and my mother made fasting sound like an outdated practice. We did not grow up in a Polish community, so there was no Polish Catholic church in our area — unlike some other parts of New Jersay. We went to a normal suburban Catholic church with Catholics from other nationalities: primarily Italian and Irish, some German as well. I never attended a parochial school — nor a private one, until I went to college.

Q: We were going through a time of social change at that point. The Catholic Church was not taking it well, with movies, literature, contraception, everything else.

ROMANSKI: I probably wasn't Catholic enough to be influenced by these trends, so whatever changes the church was going through, they didn't particularly affect me one way or the other. I think I had a more or less hands-off, or a more compartmentalized view of religion. It was not the purpose of my existence.

Q: How about politics? It was a time, I think, of Eisenhower, Kennedy, and beyond. Where was your family politically?

ROMANSKI: Neither of my parents, because they were recent immigrants, was that interested and certainly not active in politics. They would, of course, always vote once they got American citizenship. My father tended to vote Republican, and my mother tended to vote Democrat, but neither of them was very active in politics. They didn't have a lot of free time. My mother was more vocal in her political opinions than my father, but certainly neither one was tremendously engaged. My mother was active in the PTA and my father belonged to the local auxiliary police force so they were somewhat active at the community level. Neither one was particularly active in the church.

Q: I'm still waiting to run across the first person who says, “My father voted Democratic, but my mother voted Republican!”

ROMANSKI: Is that right?

[laughter]

ROMANSKI: It's interesting, isn't it?

Q: Yes, it's interesting. You graduated from high school when?

ROMANSKI: In 1965.

Q: While you were a high school kid, did the Kennedy phenomenon hit you? All of a sudden working for the government, and this is exciting, or did this particularly...

ROMANSKI: No, not at all. I can attribute the reason why I joined the Foreign Service to my aunt who lived in Washington, DC. I would visit her during the summers, many summers, and some of her friends were in the Foreign Service. She would describe foreign service life as being very interesting as it involved a lot of travel, parties, and good times. This formed my image of the Foreign Service. It was not, I might add, a particularly realistic image, except for the travel part. Still, it was my initial entree to a larger, more cosmopolitan world. Of course, I had grown up exposed to another culture, so I was interested in cross-cultural communication and what makes countries different from one another. Different cultural values already interested me. As far as politics go, I did have an influential social studies teacher in the high school. He headed the forensics program so I ended up having to debate some of the political issues of the day but these were usually domestic issues. Unfortunately, I have forgotten what they all were. I was a member of the forensics team, which meant that we would travel to other high schools in New Jersey in order to debate the topic of the day (actually it was for a whole year).

Q: Was it a given that you were going to go to college?

ROMANSKI: Yes, certainly. In our particular high school since it was so large, they had a tracking system where students were placed with those of similar aptitude. The school did not offer anything like the International Baccalaureate (I don't know whether it even existed back then), but there were basically three tracks: college prep, regular, and maybe mechanical, trade or secretarial training. I was taking all the courses that would prepare me for college. In my school these were referred to as “special classes” but a more accurate term might be “accelerated” or “advanced.” We had quite an ambitious syllabus. Many of the great works of literature that I have managed to read to this day, I read while

still in high school as a result of this program. I was initially placed in all four of the special classes except that my results in algebra were so poor that I had to drop the special class in math and fall back into a regular class. I kept Special English, Special Social Studies, and even Special Science although that was a challenge when one lacked Special Math.

Q: You graduated in '65, you say?

ROMANSKI: Yes.

Q: Where did you go then?

ROMANSKI: I then went directly to college. At that time, most of my peers did. Most kids who attended college would go directly after high school graduation without taking a year or two off. I applied to several universities and I was accepted by all of them or almost all of them. I decided to attend Stanford University in California because it was far from the East Coast where I had spent all my time up to that point (except for the time in England which I couldn't really remember very well). I also responded to the mystique of California with its perfect weather and the Beach Boys, etc. I was too late for the Beat era, but I was soon to encounter the hippie movement, the summer of love and the psychedelic rock scene of San Francisco, insofar as my studies permitted.

Q: You went to Stanford from '65 to '69?

ROMANSKI: I graduated in '69.

Q: What was Stanford like when you arrived there? How did it hit you?

ROMANSKI: The thing that very much surprised me was that I had always imagined California as a kind of Golden Land and certainly more attractive than the community in which I had grown up in New Jersey. But when I arrived, I was stunned to discover that it was really quite desiccated, all brown and ugly. It was, of course, September. I didn't realize that there was a marked contrast in the seasons and that California is not all that

attractive in September. It must be even worse now with the accentuated effects of global warming.

Q: It really is ugly. My son lives in Pasadena, and you fly over and you realize this isn't that pretty a place.

ROMANSKI: That's right. Of course, there were palm trees which struck me as exotic. Stanford has its famous Palm Drive, where very large and, no doubt, very old palm trees grow along the driveway up to the university. It is quite dramatic. Memorial Church lies at one end of Palm Drive. Other than that, I was a little bit homesick at first, but really not that much because I was eager to get out on my own. I enjoyed being with students who were smarter than I was. They were also more interesting and of more varied backgrounds. My classes, with the exception of my freshman year when I had to take a number of required courses, were for the most part challenging and interesting. I enjoyed my classes and did pretty well in them.

Q: I'm trying to capture the spirit of the times. When you were starting out in college in '65 as an obviously intelligent young woman, how did you view what you were going to be doing later on? I'm talking about the opportunity for women and that sort of thing.

ROMANSKI: The Women's Movement was just getting started in those days. Those were the days of various movements: anti-war, Black Power, women's rights, etc. In the '50s, of course, career opportunities for women were quite limited. In high school, we had the Future Teachers of America Club along with the Future Nurses of America Club. That seemed to represent the height of career aspiration for women at the time. I think I probably belonged to the Future Nurses of America Club, but I already knew that I was not likely to become either a nurse or teacher. Those professions plus being a secretary were about all most women could commonly attain at that point. Except for teachers, nurses and nuns, I did not know a single professional woman growing up.

Q: How about your aunt? What did she do?

ROMANSKI: She was just a housewife. She was very content with that. She was involved in Polish causes. I guess you could call her an example of community involvement. I remember sending endless packages of clothes and food to Poland growing up. You'd think that Poland was the most primitive country in the world from everything we were sending. I had that model of involvement but not one of professional attainment.

Q: Did you, from your student body, sense a different wind blowing regarding women?

ROMANSKI: Slowly. I think a lot of this increased consciousness grew out of the Vietnam War, which was becoming increasingly unpopular. Although Stanford was a far more conservative campus than, let's say, Berkeley, it was not very far from Stanford to Berkeley. Of course, there were influences — some people were much more involved than others. I was not particularly attracted to radical movements. I was not politicized, however, I was against the war along with most of the student body and most of the faculty at Stanford. The black movement — civil rights, the women's rights movement, protests of various sorts — were influenced by and grew from the anti-war movement. I think these kinds of reactions grew out of the same kind of inspiration, which was dissatisfaction with the status quo and the feeling that the United States should not be as comfortable with its history and its role in the world as it was. In terms of women's rights, I had a growing awareness. On the lost tape, I remember telling you about one of my required English classes.... To fulfill the requirement, I took poetry for one quarter. The professor told us that he hoped that we didn't mind, but all the men in the class were going to get the equivalent of A's, and all the women were going to get the equivalent of B's, and did anyone have a problem with it? I did have a problem with it, but I was far too timid to confront the instructor at that point and tell him.

Q: You wanted him to explain why the A/B.

ROMANSKI: The reason that he wanted to give the higher grades to the men was to keep them out of the war in Vietnam because, if your grades weren't high enough, it would increase the likelihood of getting drafted. Since most of the students were smart and the majority from affluent backgrounds, there was really very little chance of any of them being drafted any way which made his argument even more bogus, but I didn't feel I had the authority to challenge him. As far as that went, grading my poetry at the B level was probably already a gift.

Q: How did you react to the Vietnam War?

ROMANSKI: I was against it and all of my friends were against it. I don't think I knew anyone at Stanford who would admit to being for the war, although there obviously must have been some supporters. We did have ROTC on campus. The war really didn't affect our lives very much. I didn't know of students who dropped out of Stanford to go to war or put their education on hold to go overseas. Later in the Foreign Service, I did meet a number of officers, Foreign Service officers, who had served in Vietnam, but at that point there was nobody that I knew who had been affected. One of our neighbors when we were growing up in New Jersey did go to Vietnam and was killed, but they were not close friends of our family, just the people who lived next door. Although I didn't have a personal connection to the war, I still felt that it was wrong for us to be there. It didn't seem to be our fight, or the right cause.

Q: Did you find at Stanford there were student leaders or self-proclaimed leaders who were essentially trying to radicalize you...

ROMANSKI: Oh, yes.

Q: ...not just on Vietnam but on...

ROMANSKI: Vietnam was the main issue for radicals. There was a large SDS group on campus, but they turned me off.

Q: Students for a...

ROMANSKI: Students for a Democratic Society. Stanford's SDS movement was not as large as Berkeley's of course, but they would still hold rallies and maybe sit-ins, that kind of thing.... Even though I was against the war, I resented these people because I felt that they were interfering with my education and disrupting classes. The thing that really bothered me about these people most of all (and I still think that very often this is true of politicians, especially radical ones) is I was not even sure that they believed in their own causes, but rather that they were using the causes as an excuse to become the center of attention. They wanted to feel important. The cause just seemed to be an excuse. They rarely presented convincing rational arguments to win you over; they would more often offer inflammatory rhetoric in an egotistical way.

Q: Did you find that being at Stanford did you see a diversity? It had a reputation of being a rich kids' school, and you weren't a rich kid.

ROMANSKI: Certainly almost all of the students were better off than I was, although most of my friends came from backgrounds similar to my own. I guess that's one reason why we became friends — there's a natural tendency to find people one feels comfortable with. For example, black students tended to stick together. Stanford did give out a lot of scholarships as well: I think about fifty per cent of the student body received financial assistance of one form or another. I had a scholarship and worked part time as well. I also had a randomly-assigned black roommate my freshman year. In my dorm, there were suites of three room: a larger room (formerly a living room) with two smaller bedrooms on the side. I had one of the small side rooms and my Afro-American roommate had the other. It was a bond between us since we both likely felt that we had been discriminated

against. Probably whoever arrived first, grabbed the best room. Coming from so far away, I naturally drew the short straw of the small room, but I got over it.

Q: You graduated in '69, wasn't it?

ROMANSKI: Right. I should mention that one of the reasons that I had selected Stanford over some of the other schools was because it had overseas campuses. My sophomore year was my first significant experience overseas. I went to Stanford-in-France, located at that time in the city of Tours. The program later moved to Paris because that's where everyone wanted to live. The reason they picked Tours, I assume, was because it was cheaper, but the reason given to us was that it was where the purest French was spoken — not that our faulty student French benefited much from the exposure. I nonetheless enjoyed having the opportunity to go to school abroad. We lived in a French student dorm, which Stanford probably rented, but we did not go to classes with French students.

There was probably some opportunity to mingle with French students at a far distant cafeteria, however, we usually pretty much stuck to our own group of 80 students. We would have two French courses a day — in addition to some regular Stanford courses so that we could still graduate on schedule and not fall behind. We also traveled as a group, so I got to see some fascinating places. Our official trips were to Italy and to Spain. It was a lot of fun. It was also a fairly manageable group so I got to know a number of people. I'm still friends with a lot of people from my Stanford-in-France group. I made some of my best friends from that experience, but not French people. We did mingle some.... I mean, we would have cultural talks and visit cathedrals, and I remember a wine tasting session. There was an attempt to expose us to some of French culture, but it was not a total immersion program. My French was better when I returned from France than before I got there, but it was never near five five. On the other hand, I was very impressed with Europe — the cathedrals, the chateaux, the history. I had been hearing about “the old country” for years and it was great to finally see an actual old country.

Q: By the time you graduated, did you go abroad again or only...

ROMANSKI: I did. I went on a Russian language program as an undergraduate. I went to a program in Middlebury one summer. I think it was the summer between my junior and senior year. It was supposed to be a total immersion program, unlike Stanford-in-France, where we all spoke French at a variety of levels. Some had had less than one year of French and others were really quite fluent. The Middlebury program, in theory, had more rigorous requirements. We were supposed to be speaking Russian all the time, certainly in all our classes which were basically Russian language, linguistics and civilization. In fact, we often cheated in our rooms because it was tremendously artificial to speak Russian with a non-native speaker.

Q: Did the Foreign Service other than your aunt's admonitions, did that intrude at all on your...

ROMANSKI: No, not at all. Well, not especially. My major in college was history, but that was no distinction because the two most common majors at Stanford at that time were history and engineering. Engineering held no attraction for me given my history with math and desire to do something in the world of international relations, so I became a history major along with a lot of other students. Other popular majors at Stanford then were political science and English.

Q; In history, any particular area?

ROMANSKI: Undergraduate history majors at Stanford were not supposed to specialize. The history requirements were such that we had to take two history courses prior to 1500, two from the middle period, and two from the more modern era. I did take a couple of European history courses because I thought I might enter the Foreign Service and, after having seen France, would particularly like to serve in Europe.

Q: Again, when you graduated in '69, you went to where, Yale?

ROMANSKI: Yes. I was not 100% sure that I wanted to enter the Foreign Service — or that I could pass the exam for the Foreign Service, but I think it would have been unusual at that time for someone to go straight from college into the Foreign Service. I applied for a master's program in Russian and East European studies at Yale. It was a very small program. It was the heyday of areas studies programs. The Soviet Union was a country of great interest to the United States because it was still the height of the Cold War, so it looked like it would be a useful area of specialization for one of my family background. I couldn't take Polish at Stanford — it was not offered, but I continued to take Russian, so I had fairly decent Russian. I applied for the Russian and East European Studies program at Yale University, got in, and found myself with a small group of like-minded students.

Q: How did you find the Russian studies? Was it essentially taught by people who had left the Soviet Union and was anti-Soviet Union bias or by teachers who were taking a look at this, the Russia files? How would you...

ROMANSKI: I would say there were certainly some people who were #migr#s, but my most anti-Soviet teacher was actually my Russian language teacher at Stanford, who had taught me for two years. I think she was #migr# Russian nobility. She was very bitter because she had lost everything. Since she was teaching literature, how many diatribes against the Soviet Union can you work into Pushkin and poetry? Russian #migr#s also taught at Yale, but they tended to teach areas that didn't lend themselves to political discussions, perhaps intentionally on the part of Yale. They would teach early Russian history where one could identify the early trend towards expansionism. I also took one or more political science courses, but they were often taught by bright young Americans without Russian background and baggage.

Q: You were at Yale for what, two years?

ROMANSKI: Two years, but I dropped out in the middle because I became a guide on one of the USIA — United States Information Agency — exhibits to the Soviet Union. The topic for our exhibit was Education USA, in Russian it was called national education (narodnye obrazovanie). The program started in December of '69, so I had to drop out of my Master's program at Yale to go to the USSR. I thought it would be worth it and I was right. It was one of the most formative periods of my life.

Q: How did you find it?

ROMANSKI: Oh, it was totally fascinating. The experience probably created as incorrect an image of the Foreign Service as my aunt's description of travel and lots of great parties had, but it was still fascinating. This was the Cold War period. The USIA exhibits traveled around the USSR for the period of a year or two. The itinerary would be divided into a civilized half which would go to Leningrad, Moscow, or other major cities in Russia and then a more ethnic half which would travel to the former republics of the Soviet Union. These republics have now become countries on their own. My half of the exhibit went to Baku, capital of Azerbaijan; Tashkent, capital of Uzbekistan; and Novosibirsk in Russian Siberia. Those struck me as quite exotic locations at the time, and still do. It was very interesting, although tiring, work.

We would travel from city to city. Since it would take some time to ship the exhibit by rail, we would travel within the Soviet Union between exhibit sites by air. That was fascinating as well.

Q: What were your impressions of this, of the Soviet Union and the Soviet people?

ROMANSKI: I really liked the Russians and, for that matter, most of the people we met. We also met some of the other nationalities: Uzbeks and Azerbaijanis, but most of the people that we had contact with were ethnic Russians — most of whom were friendly. They were very curious about America, because all they had heard was anti-American

propaganda and they wanted to know the truth — or at least another version of it. The exhibits were very popular. We would often be mobbed. We would give out brochures on the exhibit topic. I know what it feels like to be a celebrity since we became near celebrities ourselves. Visitors would get the exhibit brochures and ask the guides to sign them. After a while, one had to refuse to sign because one's hand would get so tired. It was also very monotonous and one could never have a good conversation.

The most interesting part of being a guide would be having discussions on serious topics with a small group of visitors. We were supposed to discuss education, which was the topic of the exhibit, but one couldn't very well refuse to answer non-education-related questions. We talked about anything that they really wanted to know, and they wanted to know a lot. A lot of the questions were personal. My most frequent questions were whether I was married and how I had learned Russian. We would get serious questions about the Vietnam War and what we thought of it. We couldn't really go into politics in great detail — because the Russians knew so little about what was going on in the United States, so they couldn't ask very specific questions.

Since we were so popular, we would often receive private invitations to go into Soviet homes, which we were allowed to do as long as we were accompanied by another American — we could never go alone for fear of being compromised. It was very interesting to see how Soviet people lived: most Soviet apartments would be a little bigger than a small office except that they might be divided into two or three rooms. They would always put on a very lavish spread, as much as they could get. Russians are very hospitable. There would always be vodka, of course, and sometimes they would invite friends over. It would never be a huge gathering, because one could only invite people one trusted (not to mention that apartments were small), so it would just be either the immediate family or a few friends. The hosts tended to be people close to my age without kids, but still it was a fascinating glimpse of life behind the Iron Curtain.

Q: Did you feel any intrusion of the KGB or the government at all?

ROMANSKI: Yes. I think we were always being watched. I remember one time I was not feeling well so I was crying in the bathroom of my hotel room. We lived in hotel rooms — not very comfortable ones. If you ever traveled to the Soviet Union, they had a system of spies right on the floor — they were called dezhurnye - like door keepers. They were elderly ladies sitting at a desk who held onto the room keys. One wasn't allowed to carry around one's key. Perhaps the excuse might have been so that they could clean your room, but of course it meant that anyone could enter any room at any time. I don't remember that anything was ever taken, but papers were often re-arranged and I'm sure letters were read so one could never write anything very critical. Interesting correspondence might be photocopied — I doubt mine ever made the grade. In any case, the dezhurnia burst into the room to ask what was wrong. This convinced me that nothing was ever totally private. We had been warned not to talk about anything sensitive in our briefings. It was easy for me to comply as I didn't know any secrets, but we were also not to talk about sensitive or personal matters in the room or on the phone. If we were having some kind of anti-Soviet conversation to perhaps let off steam because the living conditions were not easy, we would always have to hold it while walking outside unless we wanted to risk being PNG'd or becoming a government incident. People were careful. It was only for six months after all and time went by quickly.

I remember one time a KGB agent locked my suitcase, no doubt after having gone through it. The problem was that I had no key for the suitcase so I had to pick the lock. It was really quite inconvenient, but I managed to pick up a new talent, not that I've made a practice of using it.

Q: When you got back to Yale, I imagine you found this very much a bust, didn't you?

ROMANSKI: It was quite a change. My Russian had improved significantly, so I could easily ace the Russian test at Yale University. It was not necessarily easy to re-enter the academic routine. Yale had not guaranteed me a place because I had dropped out but,

on the other hand, they had also said that I should reapply. So I did. Instead of getting my Masters of Arts, in '71, I got it in '72.

Q: When you got that, what were you up to?

ROMANSKI: After I had gotten my master's in Russian, I had to start thinking about careers. I really didn't think that I was academically inclined enough to pursue a career at a university. I probably wasn't studious enough for that in any case. I was not devoted enough to any particular subject or discipline, so I applied for the Foreign Service and took the exam. I didn't pass it the first time — it might have been while I was still at Yale. I was encouraged to finish my degree and try again. I passed the second time that I took the exam. They asked me a series of questions. I was lucky that they didn't ask very much about economics because that was not one of my better subjects. I remember one question from the exam. One of my second set of examiners asked me about relations between the Soviet Union and China. I had never taken a course on the topic and didn't know much about China, but I managed to bluff a wonderful answer. I think that's probably what got me into the Foreign Service. Ironically, I eventually served in China, but I was never to serve in the USSR or Russia, despite knowing Russian.

Q: You came in when?

ROMANSKI: At that time I wanted to enter USIA (the United States Information Agency) because I had more of an interest in cultural work than anything else and USIA was responsible for cultural programs overseas. Budgets for hiring back then were restricted, which meant that even State and certainly USIA had very small entering classes, unlike the large classes that we've seen in recent years. USIA was hiring only about eight to fifteen or sixteen people a year. In the meantime, I had married a classmate from the Russian and East European studies program at Yale. My husband ended up entering the Foreign Service before I did because he joined the State Department in the political cone.

State was hiring more people, so he got into a class in fall of '73 whereas I didn't make it until January of '74.

Q: How did you find your introduction to the basic officer course?

ROMANSKI: At that time, I have to confess, it was enjoyable but not terribly useful. This was particularly true for the so-called USIA training. USIA trainees spent part of the course with the regular State Department officers and part in special USIA training. USIA training was, I thought, quite strange if pleasant. For example, we had to put together a slide show. Never in the course of my USIA career did I ever have to put together a slide show and I doubt anyone did. Some of the training was similar at both State and at USIA — we'd get a series of briefings with representatives from different offices and operations. I remember we went over to the Pentagon to see what they did. Some of the USIA training was useful when we learned what the publications division did, what the speaker program was, about library support, etc. Making our own slide show most likely was not.

Q: How did the system look upon you and your husband being married at that particular point?

ROMANSKI: We were quite fortunate. Had we come in a few years earlier, one of us — most often the woman —would have had to resign from the Foreign Service. I don't know of any cases of men resigning and letting the wives enter, although perhaps there were some. By that time, the policy had changed to one in which the Department would try to assign so-called “tandem” couples together: that is to say to the same post insofar as possible. In the beginning, when there were not too many tandems, the State Department and USIA did a reasonably good job of coordinating assignments. However, it led to a rather strange career pattern for each of us, one that we would likely not have experienced had each of us been on our own. I ended up having three tours in Germany, for example, which would hardly have been the norm.

Q: Where was your first assignment?

ROMANSKI: One of those assignments to Germany was our first post, namely Hamburg, Germany. My husband, although in the political cone, had to start out by doing consular work. I think it was about six months before the consul general, a political officer himself, discovered — to his surprise and delight — that my husband was actually a political officer. This changed his assessment of my husband markedly, so much so that he decided to offer him some opportunities. A little while later, my husband was able to fill a political slot after the officer in that slot transferred. As for me, I had been assigned to the America House as the deputy branch public affairs officer. There were only two Americans and I was number two.

Q: What were you doing?

ROMANSKI: My responsibilities included running the exhibit program, which was actually quite large. I also ran the film program, which was fairly successful. Indeed, I soon got stuck with administering the film program for the entire country — and Germany had quite a few branch operations in those days! Needless to say, it was not a prestige operation, but we managed to make some money while I was in charge of selecting films. The biggest hit during my time was the film Easy Rider with Peter Fonda and Jack Nicholson. I'm not sure why the film was so popular with German audiences, maybe it fulfilled some fantasy of America still being a free and individualistic country. We were allowed to channel profits made from ticket sales (tickets were very cheap - about a mark, I think) to a German-American support organization, which would help fund food for receptions, wine for exhibit openings, etc.

Back to exhibits, there was a support shop in the embassy in Bonn. Some of the most successful exhibits we showed were photography exhibits and photography shows were relatively cheap. We had an exhibit of Gordon Parks' works — I think he also might have come out as a speaker. However, we usually arranged group shows which featured

photographs by very well known artists including Ansel Adams and Kertesz. We also had a wonderful Amish quilt exhibit, which really brightened up those large white walls. America Houses had been built large enough to accommodate sizeable exhibits. For major exhibitions, the support office in Bonn would even print an attractive little brochure. It was quite an operation in those (the good old) days. There was also an exhibit on “mural art,” i.e. the kind of large wall paintings that were getting popular in cities like Los Angeles and later Philadelphia.

I also handled some of the cultural speakers and was responsible for overseeing the library operation, which fortunately largely ran itself. The Branch Public Affairs Officer, like most successful USIA officers, was primarily interested in the media part of the operation, the press side. As a result, he would assign me what didn't interest him — namely the cultural assignments, while he ran the information side. It was probably not the best way to launch a career, not that I'm complaining at this point. It would likely have been better for my career to have been assigned to an embassy so I that I could have rotated through various sections of the embassy finding out what they actually do. In theory, I could have rotated through the consulate, but the consul general and the section chiefs were not particularly interested in having a useless person who didn't know much of anything about their section rotate in for a month or so. Just as I was finally figuring out what they were up to, it would have been time to move on to the next section. As a result, I never had a State rotation. I also had been told that I should go to Bonn to have my rotation take place at the embassy but, sadly, this was never arranged. If I had been a more “with it” officer or had made a nuisance of myself, I'm sure I could have rotated somewhere but that was not my style. I was enjoying Hamburg and was content to just let things be. I never felt under trained despite the fact that my official training slipped through the cracks.

On the whole, I would have to say that the training in Washington and in the field was of limited utility, but I preferred to learn by doing in any case. For me, it was the most effective way.

It was not part of my official training, but one of the things I found most useful was attending the annual PAO (Public Affairs Officer) conference, which was held in Berlin shortly after I arrived. All the Americans — even lowly JOTs (Junior Officer Trainees) — as well as senior FSNs (Foreign Service National employees) were allowed to attend. At that time, we must have had about seven or eight America Houses in addition to the Embassy, which was located in Bonn during those years. I took the British military train for free to Hannover, where I transferred to a German train for the rest of the route.

The conference in Berlin was exciting. I met dozens of USIS officers and FSNs, attended some interesting sessions and got some idea of how large and diverse the operation was. The purpose of the conference was to exchange information and encourage cooperation among the various branches.

Q: How effective did Germans find what we were doing? We were just coming out of the Vietnam War. Was that an issue still?

ROMANSKI: I think the impact of Vietnam was dying down. Hamburg had a sophisticated public. Despite my best efforts, our programs did not often attract a lot of Germans. My German language, despite my 20-week course in which I had gotten a 3/ or 3 plus, was not tremendously proficient. I could carry on a conversation in German, but it was not the kind of German that Germans liked to hear. Germans are not particularly tolerant of people who speak their language with less than optimal fluency, so I couldn't even find very many Germans in Hamburg with whom I could speak. Hamburg, due to its geographic location, has a strong interest in the UK but less so in the United States. Almost everyone I ran across spoke wonderful English except for the janitor at the America House, who was earning more than I was. Although I was theoretically second in command as an American, I earned less than anyone else at the House. I commanded more friendship than respect among the FSNs. If not optimal in terms of training, in many ways, it was a wonderful first post. Foreign service life was not as frantic as it is now. There was more time for reflection. My job was not that rigorous. I was even able to audit courses

at Hamburg University, which was co-located with the America House. I audited a large German class, which was useful for my German comprehension.

I would like to offer another indication of how life was different when we first entered the foreign service. The Consulate building was located right on Lake Alster, an artificial man-made lake. When the weather was fine, all the citizens of Hamburg would dress up on Sunday and promenade around the lake. We soon found out that the Consulate actually owned its own quite large sailboat, something like a 19-footer. Technically, it was for the Marines, but anyone could use it as long as they knew how to sail.

We did not know how to sail, but we went out with an economic officer who claimed that he did, as he had served in the navy. Unfortunately, his skills were rusty — and sailing on Lake Alster is actually quite tricky due to strange winds blowing among the buildings — so we soon ran aground. All the Germans came over and laughed at us. I wasn't that embarrassed because I did claim to know how to sail. We never went sailing with that officer again — he was probably too embarrassed. However, we would occasionally go out sailing with David's boss, the head of the Consular Section. He had grown up in Massachusetts and was a good sailor so we never ran aground again. However, sailing in the cold, rainy weather was not all that pleasant. I remember getting chilled to the bone. On bright, sunny days, it was marvelous but in Hamburg, such days were often few and far between. Still, I imagine we were one of very few posts with its own sailboat. I may have missed the days of traveling to post by ship, but at least I got to travel by sailboat!

One of my accomplishments during my tour in Hamburg was that I wrote a brochure for the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the America House in Hamburg. I had to do a little bit of historical research and describe our current operation. The handout was well received — perhaps four or five people actually read it, but it was a nice keepsake.

Q: Did you have contact with other nationalities?

One of the things I enjoyed most about my time in the foreign service was meeting and getting to know diplomats from other countries. Hamburg had a lot of foreign consulates (the most consulates of any city in Germany), but we mostly hung around with English-speaking diplomats. We were once invited to a party at the beautiful lakeside apartment of a British diplomat only to discover that it was the apartment in which John Le Carr# had written The Spy Who Came in from the Cold. As you may know, John Le Carr# had served in the British Foreign Service before he became a famous writer. I wish some of his skill had rubbed off on me, but it didn't.

We were also friends with Australian diplomats. At one party, they served us the most appalling Australian wine. Our palates were not very sophisticated at that time. We thought Gallo Hearty Burgundy was quite a decent wine. Nonetheless, we found the Aussie wine of the time undrinkable even for us, which is saying a lot. Needless to say, Australian wine and our taste in wine have both developed since those days.

The most surprising event was most likely our party with the Russians. I can no longer recall what the occasion was except that it had been orchestrated by our CIA contingent, which was very large. All sorts of Russian speakers emerged from the woodwork of the U.S. Consulate. Perhaps Hamburg was some kind of listening post. In any case, when the Russians reciprocated according to the rules of the game, I remember they showed us some kind of movie from one of the Central Asian republics. It was not even in Russian and we all found it very boring. Fortunately, the second reel was upside down so the film showing ended. We all sat around drinking vodka until we were allowed to stagger home.

Q: You left Hamburg when?

ROMANSKI: I was in Hamburg from '74 to '76, and then we left. This was a JOT assignment: Junior Officer Training. Actually, we were called Public Affair Trainees, PATs, and then I left for Warsaw in 1976. Before leaving Hamburg, I would like to tell you a story from my original tape. The story is about how well the citizens of Hamburg, the

Hamburgers, spoke English. You will recall that I was responsible for cultural speakers. One of the speakers who came to Hamburg, I remember vividly, was the American writer Paul Theroux. He came by train.

Q: The Travel writer?

ROMANSKI: That's right. He had just written The Great Railroad Bazaar, or a similarly popular work and he was promoting it with appearances before prospective readers. He wrote a lot of travel-based literature. In any case, he came to Hamburg by train, which was the customary way for speakers to arrive. I had to meet him at the train station, which I absolutely hated doing because the train station was so large and there were so many exits that it was almost impossible to meet anyone. I almost invariably would miss the speaker and call the America House only to discover that the visitor had been cooling his heels there for half an hour waiting for me! Talk about embarrassment. In that particular case, however, semi-miraculously, we managed to connect. Perhaps I recognized him from the photo on the back of the book jacket. I was very surprised to discover that, even though he was American, he spoke with a pronounced British accent from living in England and having a British wife. He didn't seem to be a very American American. He was smoking a pipe and asked me if I knew the German word for pipe cleaner. Of course I had no idea. In my very basic German course, we never covered anything as exotic as that. In his very British accent, he said “Why don't I just pop on over to that kiosk and ask the chap.” So he went over to the person selling tobacco in the Hamburg train station and said, “My good man, do you have any pipe cleaners?” The vendor said, “Of course! What amount would you like?” Right then and there, I knew there was little hope for my German in Hamburg if even tobacconists spoke perfect English.

One of the other writers who came to Hamburg during my time was the science fiction author Frederick Pohl. The exciting thing about him for me was not his writing — although that was OK as far as I could tell, but that he lived in Red Bank, a town located only a few

miles from where I had grown up in New Jersey. One travels halfway around the world only to discover someone living right next door.

Q: This is tape two, side 1, with Anna Romanski. You were saying . . . ?

ROMANSKI: You had asked a question about Lech Walesa and Solidarity — whether they were active at the time. I had answered, “Not yet.” The first step was the visit of the pope, which was extremely significant for Poland. The election of a Polish pope — namely Pope John Paul II, formerly Cardinal Wojtyla — gave people a tremendous boost. It was an indication of change, of hope that their world didn't have to be the way it was. It was a real turning point. The roads on which the white Popemobile (as we called it, i.e. the very open papal vehicle) drove were strewn with flowers. People lined the streets dozens deep to catch a glimpse of the Pope. Thousands attended the outdoor mass in Victory Square. There was a mood of such jubilation. For Poles — whether they were religious or not — it was the most wonderful event ever to have happened in their lifetimes. The Pope was a grander celebrity than any rock or movie star. This spirit of exhilaration, of possibility, of change gave impetus to Lech Walesa and Solidarity (Solidarnosc in Polish). If not for the Polish pope, Solidarity might never have happened or might have taken a lot longer to happen.

Another memorable event from my time in Poland was the visit of President Jimmy Carter. This was the famous visit captured in collective memory because the translator mistranslated one of the President's remarks, a remark that he had “lusted after” someone, subjecting the poor translator and the U.S. to ridicule. The President came in the dead of winter. All work at the Embassy (except perhaps for issuing visas) stopped for months as everyone prepared for the visit. It was a big deal in those days. I remember that I got to shake the President and Mrs. Carter's hand at the airport as they were leaving the country. We all had a big Wheels Up party because it had been so much work on top of all that was already going on. Not to mention that the President and Mrs. Carter had come around

Christmas time — to our and the Poles' consternation. Christmas is a big deal in a Catholic country like Poland.

In the late '70's, the Poles for the most part were not very happy with their lives, which was one of the difficulties of the assignment. The weather was bad — although in fact we had only one really severe winter when snow covered the ground from November to May. The snow, although pretty at first, would soon become covered with black, sooty coal dust and lie about in slick black heaps. It was very ugly. The winter was also very long. In December, we would only have about six hours of daylight from nine a.m. to three p.m. One of my colleagues told the story of how one day when driving to Berlin for supplies (we all managed to make this trip several times a year), her little girl asked what that mysterious object was up in the sky. The mother felt terribly guilty about what she was perpetrating on her daughter when the mysterious light turned out to be the sun. People were depressed and not terribly friendly. Life wasn't easy for them — nor always for us, although we had it better than the Poles.

I was fortunate in that I had close relatives who still lived in Poland. My father's brother and his wife lived in Warsaw with their son as well as a sister and her daughter, who was about my age. A sister, whom we also visited, lived in Katowice with my grandmother, who was quite elderly but still alive. My mother's brother and his family lived in Golina, a town in Western Poland on the way to Berlin. I had been quite surprised to receive an assignment to Poland with such close relatives living there, but Security did not seem to be concerned. The aunt who was married to my father's brother in Warsaw was a communist who allowed us to visit her, but she would never visit us. She said I would understand why, but I never did. She was Jewish and had survived the camp in Auschwitz (Oswiecim in Polish). She had family in Israel. During my tour, she was killed by a hit-and-run driver crossing a street in Old Town Warsaw near her apartment. They never caught the person who did it. I couldn't stop crying at her funeral because I felt it was such a horrible way to die for someone who had already suffered so much.

It was a very enriching experience to have family in Poland. We got to know the way Poles really lived and gained real insights into the society, which was not an easy one for its citizens. One of my cousins waited over twenty years to get assigned an apartment. Poland has changed a lot since those days.

Q: Did you run across the Polish love for the Russians?

ROMANSKI: No. There was no Polish love for the Russians. People never wanted to speak Russian, but I wouldn't have wanted to speak Russian with the Poles in any case so it wasn't a problem. The Poles didn't like the Germans either.

Q: You didn't find Russians protesting your exhibits, or anything like that?

ROMANSKI: No. I don't recall anything like that. The Russians had a very large presence in Poland at the time, but I cannot really remember any contact, unlike what I described for you in Hamburg where we would have these little d#tente evenings with the Russians. Nothing like that happened with the Russians in Poland. After it became known that our next assignment would be Beijing, Chinese diplomats became quite engaged and friendlier than ever before.

Q: Get some good food?

ROMANSKI: We did. We were invited to the Chinese embassy twice I think. I particularly remember one meal. It was probably the best Chinese food I have ever eaten in my life — perhaps it only seemed that way because Polish cooking tended to be quite bland. In any case, the Chinese chef made a number of specialties including caramelized apples (”basi pingguo” in Chinese) for dessert, a dessert that I was never able to find in China — or in Chinese restaurants here for that matter. Plus he made a main dish called something like “the four treasures,” consisting of four thin threads of meat and vegetables — quite pretty. I couldn't get enough of that.

One of the difficulties of the assignment in Poland during winter was that it was really very difficult to get much fresh produce. Shortages were common and standing in line was also common. I remember one time we couldn't even buy onions. What can one cook without onions? In Poland, if there was a line, people would automatically stand in it and ask questions later. Sometimes it would be for oranges or bananas, sometimes for toilet paper. No wonder people were depressed.

I should tell you more about my assignment in Poland before going on to China. My assignment was as ACAO, Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer. I was in charge of the educational exchange program, much of the cultural program and supervised the library, which was located in the Embassy. Needless to say, we did not have many visitors, but I was responsible for spending the large library budget and ordering books. I remember having run-ins with the RLO, Regional Library Officer, who would constantly tell me to order inexpensive paperbacks. I had a problem with this suggestion for two reasons: paperbacks were cheap and we had a problem with theft. What could be easier than stealing a paperback? Obviously, some of our visitors shared Lenin's philosophy that it is not a crime to steal a book. I would have bought outsized editions of everything except that they weren't available. The other problem was that we had a large budget: paperbacks were pretty inexpensive in those days and did not make much of a dent in the budget. I had a very busy job, the busiest of my career, and could not spend all my time ordering books, a duty that should really have been the Polish head librarian's job, but she was not up to the task.

In addition to my own job, I had to cover for the other ACAO who was the English Teaching Officer. Hers was a regional job similar to the Library Officer's, which meant that she was on the road fully half the time. In addition to my extensive regular duties, as a native speaker, I had to give English tests, supervise her FSN, meet with her grantees and fulfill her other functions when she was not around. In retrospect, I'm sure that I was not always gracious about it — not because I disliked the tasks, but because I was often

feeling overwhelmed with my own particular duties. As this was only my second tour, I was probably not yet very effective at organizing my time efficiently.

The U.S. had a Cultural Exchange Agreement with Poland in those days, which was modeled on the one we had with the USSR. It allowed for the exchange of a certain number of exhibits, musical groups, speakers, etc. in addition to a large educational exchange under the Fulbright program, which was my primary responsibility. At that time, there was no bilateral Fulbright Commission to handle the details of the exchange like publicity, recruitment and, most especially, the care and feeding of the exchange participants. I had little contact with the Polish Fulbrighters beyond handling some paperwork, but taking care of the American Fulbrighters was usually a full time job in and of itself. I had two quite competent Polish assistants, but the bulk of the work fell to me. We had two categories of Fulbrighters: lecturers and students. The students, who had to speak some Polish to qualify for their awards, were rarely a problem. However, the lecturers, who were assigned to Polish universities to teach courses, were another case entirely. They did not speak Polish and often ran into problems with their universities — in the first instance over housing, which the university was supposed to provide. When there were differences of opinion or expectation, the Embassy would have to step in to mediate.

One of my duties was meeting the Fulbrighters when they arrived in the country at the airport. I'll never forget the case of one Fulbrighter, a lecturer in linguistics assigned to the University of Poznan. Instead of accompanying baggage, he had brought along his dog! The pooch had survived the trip well apparently, but I was amazed at the lecturer's confidence in the system. I had been in the country long enough to know that air freight often took months to arrive. In some cases, it never arrived. However, in this particular instance, the scholar's faith was rewarded — his air freight arrived in only a few day! I couldn't help marveling at his luck.

In running the Fulbright program, one encountered difficulties with each side. In the case of the Polish side, they would usually try to request mainly scholars in linguistics and

science. This was a problem because not that many scientists applied for the Fulbright program. Most applicants were in the humanities. In addition, we would try to persuade the Polish Ministry of Education to accept candidates who taught American literature and American history so that Polish students could learn something about our culture, values and society in addition to just the sounds and syntax of the English language.

On the other hand, CIES (the Council for the International Exchange of Scholars), the organization administering the US side of the Fulbright program, was occasionally guilty of strange behavior as well. We had one difficult case in which CIES wanted to send a particular US professor to a particular Polish University in Lublin. We never placed the lecturer, but the US Fulbright Program would stubbornly nominate him year after year. Finally, my Polish assistant Zosia revealed that we should under no circumstances press the Polish side to accept him. The US lecturer had been assigned to Lublin a few years before. He had carried on an affair with one of his attractive Polish students; his wife had become depressed and committed suicide by sticking her head in an oven. The professor then married the student who now wanted to return to Lublin to be near her family. We convinced CIES that the scandal had not yet died down in Poland and that they should just put the nomination on hold for a while, but it took a fair amount of persuasion to convince them.

One of the most difficult situations I ever had to face occurred on the student side of the program. I was called my the marine guard at home in the evening. He told me that the father of one of the Fulbright students had died. The guard was quite scandalized when I refused to call the student late at night. I should have told the guard that it was not his decision, but instead I told him that bad news would keep. The next day, I contacted the Fulbrighter with dread. How do you tell someone that his father had just died? Fortunately, the student made it easy for me. He told me that he had had a dream about this and was not in the least surprised. This experience taught me that often dreading an event may be

worse than the event itself, a valuable lesson for Presidential visits, which were rarely as awful as anticipated.

Among my accomplishments while administering the program was updating and correcting the information which the Fulbrighters received prior to arrival, a massive undertaking which had not been done in years. In addition, I managed to persuade the exchange office at USIA to award the Polish Fulbrighters the same amount of grant money that the American Fulbrighters had been receiving for years. In order to save money, the office had gotten away with giving the Poles a lesser sum. I had to first convince my boss and then later the office that it would be a huge scandal if the Poles were to learn how they had been taken advantage of for so many years, in effect treated like second-class scholars. Polish pride would not have stood for it.

We had a few important U.S. cultural events while I was in Poland. We organized a major exhibit of American art from the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and the visit of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra under Zubin Mehta. These were billed as bicentennial celebrations commemorating two hundred years of American history and culture. It was a lot of work (and expense to the taxpayer) to bring over an entire symphony orchestra, so much so that this was the only time in my career that it ever happened.

I don't want to leave the impression that the assignment in Poland was all gloom and depression. I was able to meet and get to know members of my family, which was a very satisfying experience. We also made a lot of friends among the other American diplomats. We would often have great parties. I remember that we gave an April Fool's Day party one year. My gift to the IO (Information Officer) was a book allegedly by a Polish journalist, Max Berezowski if I remember correctly, who had recently gone on an IV (International Visitor Program) visit to the US. The book was titled My Positive Impressions of the US — when one opened it, it was entirely blank. The journalist never had a kind word to say about the U.S. before or after his visit. The Consular Section also had difficult

clients. There was one regular visitor, not all there apparently, who wanted to marry a chimpanzee, so many of us faced challenges in our jobs.

I learned how to play paddle tennis, also known as platform tennis. We would hold tournaments with the American Embassy in Moscow every year, one year in Moscow — then in Warsaw. Serving in Moscow was much tougher than Warsaw but the Embassy was also larger so they almost always won the tournament. This reminds me of a joke of the time. A train leaves Paris and arrives in Warsaw, another train leaves Moscow and also arrives in Warsaw. When the passengers from Paris get off in Warsaw, they think they have arrived in Moscow and, correspondingly, when the passengers from Moscow get off in Warsaw, they think they have arrived in Paris: everything is relative.

Q: So, in 79, how did the China assignment come about?

ROMANSKI: A special notice came out that they needed people to study Chinese for an assignment in China. This would have been after Nixon had visited China: we were on the verge of normalizing relations with China. There was a shortage of Chinese speakers. The notice said that those within certain grades could apply for the opportunity. Both my husband and I needed assignments, applied and were accepted for Chinese language training.

Q: You took Chinese language training from when to when?

ROMANSKI: We studied Chinese from 1979 to 81. It was a two-year course.

Q: Where did you take it?

ROMANSKI: The first year was at FSI, the Foreign Service Institute in Rosslyn, which is not nearly as nice as NFATC, the National Foreign Affairs Training Center which we have now. The second year was on Taiwan. The State Department had a policy whereby one studied the difficult two-year languages for one year at FSI and one year in the country

where the language was spoken so that one could have more exposure to encourage language acquisition. This was perhaps less effective for Chinese because the Chinese language has a great many dialects. We were taught Mandarin because most of us were going to the Mainland, but on Taiwan, they spoke another dialect although most people could understand Mandarin (although not necessarily our Mandarin). In addition, the writing systems are different on Taiwan and in mainland China. Mainland Chinese uses a simplified writing system, while Taiwan retains the original classical writing system, which is much more difficult. Very few of the characters would actually be the same. This meant that we couldn't read Taiwanese newspapers.

So the question arises: how useful was the reinforcement? It was useful mostly because the quality of instruction was much better on Taiwan than it had been back here at FSI. To achieve literacy in Chinese, one would have to know a certain number of characters. In Chinese, as in all foreign languages, we are tested in speaking and in reading. (Not in writing, thank God.) Chinese is interesting because it contains a great dichotomy. Spoken Chinese is relatively simple, except for the tones, because the grammar is simple and there are no conjugations or declensions. Reading and writing Chinese is very difficult, however, because the Chinese never developed an alphabet. To achieve basic literacy in Chinese, one would have to memorize a minimum of 5,000 characters. The more one could memorize, the better one's reading score would likely be. The first year, we seemed to futz around forever learning the same 500 basic characters over and over again. This meant that we had an incredible workload during the second year in order to get up to speed. All of us complained about it. But, as usual, FSI did not pay any attention to us. I think the feeling was, “We know better than you do. We are the teachers. You are the students.” Or perhaps, the teachers were just lazy. In China, teaching — this goes back to Confucius — is a venerated profession, much more so than in the U.S. One goes back to the old “laoshi” (teacher) tradition. I felt that it was counterproductive for FSI to ask us to evaluate the course and then not bother to take any of our recommendations for its improvement, but this is what was usually done with each language.

Q: When you were going through Chinese language training that year in Taiwan, were you getting the Taiwanese side of things?

ROMANSKI: Not really because we didn't have much contact with the Taiwanese. The campus was up on a mountain, Yangmingshan. At one point, the school had been in Taichung further south, but it had been moved to a suburb of Taipei, Taiwan's largest city, where the American Institute in Taiwan (the substitute for an Embassy) was located. Taiwan was no longer allowed to have an Embassy since we had recognized Mainland China. As far as living conditions, we were comparatively lucky. We had a separate campus — not as nice as NFATC, however it included living quarters. The classrooms were located up on the mountain. We all lived in former military housing, which was simple but perfectly adequate. To have contact with the Taiwanese, one would have to descend the mountain to try to locate native speakers. It was an effort. None of us had cars. None of us knew the Taiwanese dialect. We would have to take public transportation. Usually one went into Taipei not to practice one's Chinese but to go to a restaurant or shopping. We also went to the art museum, which had some wonderful items taken from the Mainland, especially massive Shang Dynasty bronzes.

Our teachers were mostly native Taiwanese, but they taught us Mandarin and kept their political views to themselves.

Q: What were you slated for and what was your husband's assignment?

ROMANSKI: I was once again destined to be an Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer. My husband had been assigned to the Political Section.

Q: So then you went to Beijing?

ROMANSKI: Yes.

Q: And you were there from 81 to . . . ?

ROMANSKI: We were there from 1981 to '83. I would have preferred to have stayed longer so that I could have made better use of my investment in Chinese. However, given the nature of the assignment process with its two-year language learning curve, we would have had to extend before we had even set foot in the country. As we were learning Chinese, we would periodically hear terrible stories about Beijing: how unhealthy it was, how anti-American the Chinese were, how everybody hated the assignment, etc. None of our group was willing to take the risk — the system mitigated against it.

Q: So what was Beijing like then? How would you describe our relations between 81 and 83?

ROMANSKI: They were probably pretty frosty. We were in the process of greatly expanding our relations with China, which was why so many of us were being trained in Chinese and had been sent to Beijing or Shanghai, but we didn't have an attractive embassy at all. We were located in the former Pakistan embassy so it was extremely crowded. I had to share a small room with another officer: the other assistant cultural affairs officer. The press attach# never got tired of telling people that his office was a former bathroom. There was very little privacy and it was often hard to work. My fellow ACAO administered the educational exchange program. When she had visitors in our cramped space, I could hardly concentrate on my own work, yet there was no where else to go....I was living in a hotel so I could not have worked at home even if that had been allowed.

I was the ACAO, Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer, responsible for cultural affairs. The program was just starting up so everyone felt that there would be enough work for two ACAOs. I handled culture and the other Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer handled education. She was the one with the most visitors.

Q: What did you do as a cultural officer in China? How did you find the receptivity to what you were doing?

ROMANSKI: The most curious people about life in America that I have ever encountered were actually the Soviets. They were genuinely interested in American culture and would ask all kinds of questions. They would ask about movie actors they might have heard of, what kind of cars we drove, etc. They were truly curious. The Poles were somewhat curious, although at a more sophisticated level, perhaps asking about the latest trends or universities.

The Chinese were not very curious at all. They tended to be rather isolated. They didn't have a lot of information. At least the Soviets or the Poles had heard of developments, which they could inquire about. The Chinese were starting from a much lower base. Not to mention that the Cultural Revolution had likely discouraged interest in things foreign.

Q: I was going to say, we are still talking about a very early period in Chinese-American relations.

ROMANSKI: That's true.

Q: You might say that that whole Chinese revolution that happened . . .

ROMANSKI: Right, the cultural revolution.

Q: No. Not the cultural revolution. I'm talking about the revolution we are seeing now.

ROMANSKI: Okay. Oh, none of that. In fact, when we were there, one of the things that was so striking was that there were no cars, no privately-owned cars. Everybody rode bicycles. It was much better in terms of pollution. I shudder to think of what the air quality must be like now. The only privately-owned cars belonged to diplomats and official entities such as ministries, units or factories. No private person would have been allowed to own a car.

Q: Speaking of the cultural revolution, this was such a horrendous thing. Was this just a non-topic?

ROMANSKI: I never talked with a Chinese person about the cultural revolution. It was still too close in time, not to mention that one would usually avoid political topics. When we were studying Chinese in Taiwan, one of the more useful teaching techniques was to watch and listen to video tapes of broadcasts from the mainland. I think the trials of the Gang of Four were going on at that time. We would listen to the tapes to try to understand them as best we could. It was even harder to understand the mentality, so unlike our own.

Chinese was one of those very strange languages. It was unlike anything that I had ever studied before. When people on TV would speak Chinese, for quite a while, I would understand absolutely nothing. Then, all of a sudden, I'd finally catch a phrase. Suddenly, almost miraculously, I would start to understand almost everything. It is just a series of sounds, of tones really. Until one grasps a key phrase, comprehension hovers around zero.

Q: Who was the ambassador while you were there?

ROMANSKI: The ambassador was Arthur Hummel. He was an old China hand. He had been born of missionary parents.

Q: PAO and CAO?

ROMANSKI: The Public Affairs Officer when I arrived was John Thompson, but he was soon replaced by Norrie Smith. The Cultural Affairs Officer was Leon Slawecki. Both Leon and Norrie were China hands, which meant that each of them spoke quite good Chinese. Leon was even married to a woman of Chinese descent who had grown up on Taiwan. Norrie was divorced.

Q: How did you find the cultural side of things? Was it a work in progress? Were there good contacts?

ROMANSKI: No. It was definitely a work in progress. We were trying to promote relations, trying to educate the Chinese a bit more about the United States. They were trying to send their people over while we were trying to send our people over. I handled the speaker program, visiting American scholars or other specialists who we thought might be of some interest to Chinese audiences. We would often place them at Chinese universities. As in Poland, but even more so, there was an incredible amount of bureaucracy involved, many layers of approval. It often took a lot of paper work for very little happen.

Q: Were we at the point where there was almost a flood of Chinese students coming to the United States?

ROMANSKI: No. We weren't quite there yet although there was great interest in studying in the U.S. You might remember that I mentioned how Poles were unfriendly until I opened my mouth and they realized I was an American. In China, people would approach western-looking foreigners to practice their English, which was often surprisingly good. This would never happen in Poland — people rarely spoke English and would never want to practice it. In China, it happened all the time. However, whenever they asked the question of where do you work or what do you do, the response “American Embassy” would be a real conversation killer. Ordinary Chinese were very concerned about their own security forces, much more so than Soviet citizens seemed to fear the KGB, in part probably due to the recency of the Cultural Revolution.

Our Embassy had a large number of Chinese spouses although I don't think there were any Chinese-American officers at that time. Had my Chinese been more fluent, I might have been able to conduct a different level of conversation and attain a richer experience.

American students or teachers had much more contact with ordinary Chinese. They didn't have the stigma of being an official American. In many ways, China was my most interesting tour because I felt like I was something of a pioneer. However, we had only the most limited contact with the Chinese. We lived in a hotel our first year but, by the second year, we had moved into a modest apartment. In all that time, the only Chinese person I was able to invite over was my Chinese teacher who was allowed to come.

On my husband's side, however, there would be dinners for official contacts. The Chinese behaved very peculiarly. One tended to entertain early in China, which I personally appreciated so that we could clean up before the next day. If dinner began at the normal hour of six p.m. and five Chinese guests had been invited, all of them would arrive together exactly on the dot of six. All of them would leave together as well — precisely at eight o'clock. No one would linger. No one would deviate from the pattern. It would be too suspicious. When we had our apartment, we would also entertain foreign diplomats and other members of the large international community. They came and went in a less regimented fashion.

Q: Did you get out in the country at all?

ROMANSKI: Not much. It was almost impossible to meet people. It was difficult to get out into the country. As in the USSR, one needed permission to travel outside one's area of assignment. It was actually my most fascinating tour, not because of the contact with the Chinese, but because of the interesting international community. Nobody, except for the Japanese, really had decent contacts with the Chinese. They were just too closed to diplomats. So — for the only time in my life — during those two years, we had a very interesting circle of friends that consisted of foreign diplomats, journalists, business people and the occasional academic who happened to be in China at the same time with us.

We would socialize quite a bit within the international community. This was the only post at which my husband and I played a significant amount of bridge. For once, I felt that all

the bridge that I had ended up playing in grad school was paying off. It was actually a very enjoyable assignment — in many ways, my favorite.

Q: Tell me about some of the cultural things that you were doing?

ROMANSKI: We brought the New York City ballet over, which was quite a sensation. I remember meeting and working with Jerome Robbins, the famous choreographer, who had worked with Balanchine, an even more legendary figure. Arthur Miller came over to put on a performance of his play Death of a Salesman. It was performed in Chinese so I could just barely understand it, despite having studied the original. The famous Chinese actor who played Willy Loman insisted on wearing a ghastly blond wig, like the hairdo of a rag doll. I guess it was the politically correct depiction of a “foreign devil” since he refused to go on without his wig. In my contacts with Miller, I of course wanted to ask him what it had been like to have been married to Marilyn Monroe, but I didn't dare. After all, I was a diplomat and had to behave “diplomatically.”

The actor Kirk Douglas came over with his photographer wife Inge Morath. We had shown his film Lust for Life — about the painter Vincent van Gogh. I remember having a nice exchange with Kirk. He asked me what travel in China was like as he was to go on to another post. I said that we usually flew, because the train would take too long. I also informed him that the plane had only one class, and it definitely wasn't first. We had to laugh about that.

Another visitor I remember — although he was not cultural — was former President Nixon. He was well received by the Chinese since he had opened China, but less well received by the Embassy because we still remembered Watergate. I remember attending some a reception at which Nixon made some kind of sexist remark about being happy to see so many “little women” out here supporting their husbands. Not only was the remark sexist, but it was also off base since all the women he saw were working at the Embassy. It was

the kind of post where most of the spouses sought employment, unless they had very young children.

President George Herbert Walker Bush also visited. To demonstrate that sexism was not all on the Chinese side, I got to arrange a tea for the Embassy wives with Mrs. Bush at the Ambassador's residence. I suppose I could have protested, but I honestly didn't mind. In fact, the event was a great success — contrary to our cookie-pushing image, tea parties don't get one promoted! I think each and every wife came, whether they were working wives or not. This was unusual since a lot of the Chinese-American wives didn't like to mingle much for whatever reason but, for an event of this caliber, they all showed up. It was a lovely event if I do say so myself.

We were working on another big cultural project but just as we were getting to the fruition point, the famous Hu Na incident occurred. Although Hu Na is now buried in the shrouds of memory, she was once a fairly mediocre tennis player who defected to the U.S. towards the end of my tour. Everything was put on hold. Visits were cancelled. Nothing could happen. For my last several months, I basically had nothing to do. Fortunately, I managed to escort a couple of “study groups,” which had been allowed under our exchange agreement. I got to serve as a sort of escort — certainly not an escort interpreter because my Chinese never got good enough so that I could serve as an interpreter. Ironically, I got plenty of compliments on my Chinese, something that rarely happened in Poland. In China, Chinese people would say, “Oh, you speak such wonderful Chinese.”

Chinese, as a spoken language, is actually very simple because it has almost no grammar. It is an advanced language in that respect, unlike the highly inflected languages of Polish or Russian. It is difficult because of the tones and because of the writing system. Most of us never really paid that much attention to tones. At first I thought the Chinese were pulling my leg (or perhaps even subtly insulting me) when they complimented me on my Mandarin. However, I realized that since we had been through two years of schooling, we actually sounded pretty good whenever we spoke Chinese with a Chinese for whom

Mandarin was a second or maybe third tongue. Everybody spoke dialect. Naturally, we couldn't speak any dialect at all. It was very common, if still disconcerting, for me to get compliments on my rather primitive Chinese. It was just another aspect that made the assignment interesting.

With regard to the study groups, I remember that I got to accompany a group of museum specialists. Another time I got to accompany a National Parks Service delegation to various cities in China. It was fascinating. I welcomed the opportunity to get out of Beijing, which could get pretty grey and depressing in winter. I took that wonderful trip along the Li River near Guilin: this is the magical, misty scenery that one occasionally sees in movies and that regularly appears in many Chinese paintings. It was an unforgettable experience. I enjoyed seeing more of the country, which one couldn't see as an ordinary traveler. One had to apply to travel — and, it was very expensive to travel as an individual in those days. This was probably another way for the Chinese to encourage group travel. The Chinese were happy to have an Embassy officer accompany official delegations, because even if we couldn't serve as an official interpreter, I could still interpret the culture and explain differences. Delegation members would complain to us and we would try to raise the matter with Chinese officials if circumstances warranted.

I'd like to give an example, not that I could do anything about it, but it is actually one of my more amusing anecdotes. It will also give an indication of how limited my Chinese really was. In China, delegation members were assigned only certain rooms of certain hotels — rooms that were bugged, basically. One of these rooms had a round mouse hole in it — it was quite funny actually because it looked exactly like mouse holes do in cartoons. I went to the official escort to ask for another room at the delegation member's request. However, instead of saying that the room had a mouse hole, I said that the room had a tiger hole. The Chinese word for tiger is “laohu,” which to me was very similar for the Chinese word for mouse, which is “laoshu.” I forgot and said tiger by mistake. However, it didn't make any difference — not for the guest, who got to stay in his room with the mouse hole, and certainly not for the Chinese, who weren't about to change the room even if it had been

a tiger hole! I was amazed at the lack of reaction on the Chinese part. In the U.S., most people would have roared with laughter at someone making such a silly mistake. I never could understand the total lack of reaction. Perhaps the Chinese just expect foreigners to make these kinds of mistakes or maybe they were being polite.

Q: When you were getting something like the New York City ballet, how was dealing with the cultural bureaucracy?

ROMANSKI: Just as in Poland or any of these communist countries, everything was laid down in great-to-excruciating detail. Number of performances. Receptions. I think the American side gave a reception and the Chinese side gave one as well. If I'm not mistaken, I think the Chinese side may have returned some tickets to us saying that they could not be sold. That was certainly not the case because the ballet would have been such a curiosity that people would have been glad to come. Not to mention that the tickets didn't cost anything. This was more likely a reflection on the kind of people who would be allowed to attend such a Western event. We may have gotten permission to distribute leftover tickets to dance students. In any case, it all worked out in the end.

Q: Did you have children there?

ROMANSKI: No. We never had children. That would have served as a kind of entr#e, however. The Chinese liked young children. Living conditions in China at that time were very difficult. Except for the ambassador and DCM, we all had to live in a diplomatic compound with diplomats from other countries. It was located not far from where we worked. I would often ride my bicycle to work. That was one of the best ways to have contact with ordinary Chinese, who would often wave in a friendly fashion. They saw that you were living like one of them rather than a privileged foreigner.

In the housing compound, all the apartments were quite small. At that time, if you had a large family, you couldn't bring them all. The Chinese had a one-child policy, we had a two-child policy. The post may have had an unusual profile since, at the time, it consisted

mainly of people who were single, married people with no children, and those with one or two children or whose children were older and already in boarding school or college. It was not a particularly child-friendly post.

Q: Did you get any feel for Chinese culture?

ROMANSKI: Some. There was not a whole lot to do during one's time off so we would go out to the Great Wall. We could visit the Summer Palace, the Ming Tombs or a temple. There was a summer resort called Beihai, which one could book for weekends during the summer. There may have been a museum or art gallery as well. We attended one Chinese opera, but I think that may have been in Taiwan. Although my husband and I are both opera lovers (or perhaps because we are opera fans), we never acquired a taste for Chinese opera, which sounds very screechy to the Western ear. We attended a symphony performance but it was not very good — the musicians were still suffering the effects of the Cultural Revolution during which Western culture including music, and indeed much Chinese culture, had been outlawed as bourgeois, decadent and unnecessary.

Many of us, particularly the women, spent time frequenting the antique stores. Even if one was not a shopper by nature, it was a way to pass the time until one tired of it. One could still find items that had been confiscated during the Cultural Revolution and were now being sold for hard currency. China was the only post where I found time to do any significant amount of shopping.

Q: You left when?

ROMANSKI: In '83.

Q: Was there a discernable difference in relations from when you arrived?

ROMANSKI: Our relations had actually worsened because of the Hu Na incident. U.S.-Chinese relations did not seem to be on a very even keel but subject to suspicion and

fluctuation. Like the USSR and Poland, China was another country which had a strong interest in obtaining sensitive information. China was not a county where one could hire anyone one liked. Diplomatic services would assign people to various positions. The quality of the foreign national staff varied considerably. Two of our cultural section employees were quite efficient and had a good feel for public affairs work. Mr. Wang was a younger man, whose career potential had likely been damaged by the cultural revolution. He was quite smart but his education had been shortchanged. All of our employees were good communists, but it would have been pointless to discuss the respective merits of our systems.

On one occasion, I had to xerox something and noticed that one of our employees, ostensibly a male secretary who spoke almost no English, was copying something. I noticed that it was written in Russian, a language I know. I couldn't see what it was exactly but, when I came, he quickly folded and put the item away. I had some mixed feelings but decided that it would do no harm to report the incident. I told the RSO (Regional Security Officer) that an employee was copying Russian documents which had nothing to do with his work for us. It caused a bit of a flap, but I'm fairly sure we were not able to get rid of this person as his real employer was most likely not our government. If he was a spy, he didn't cut a particularly glamorous figure. Nor could I imagine that he was very effective since his English seemed to be quite minimal.

Q: How did the Hu Na thing play out?

ROMANSKI: I had to leave that summer so I was not around when the Chinese stopped punishing us. In China, we also had a film program featuring American films, many of them quite old. Each section got to invite its contacts. Depending on the film, some Chinese would actually attend. Afterwards, there would be a big reception. After Hu Na, the film program was put on hold. There were also a number of official visits, which were also subjected to the diplomatic climate.

You asked earlier about Chinese culture: a lot of the culture centered around food. We would often go out to eat — especially with out-of-town visitors, of whom we had a large number since China was recently opened — but the food in most of the restaurants was really quite awful in those days. It thrilled me that I lost a lot of weight without trying at all. Some of the Westerners we knew who traveled around China ended up getting quite sick. Many family members and even diplomats had to be Medevaced to Hong Kong but I was never so lucky. Everyone had to be tested for parasites stateside when they returned.

You asked about what it was like to be duty officer over weekends. Depending on the country and how large the post was, it could be more or less onerous. In China, so-called death by duck was most common during the tourist season. Fortunately, China was already quite a well-staffed post so I may have served as duty officer only once every six months or so.

Tourist groups were just starting to discover China. Some of the tourists were quite elderly. They would be feted with the usual elaborate twelve-course banquets of rich or oily food, on top of a lot of sightseeing often during hot weather. Not everyone was up to the challenge. The unlucky duty officer in the consular section would have to deal with the results....

I did, however, handle a death case in Poland. The consular officer praised me because I had actually followed the instructions in the duty officer book and sent out a cable. He was also quite surprised since most officers choose to wait for the consular section to re-open on Monday. I guess I didn't know any better since it was only my second tour.

Q: You left China, and then what?

ROMANSKI: Before leaving China, let me tell you a story that is actually my husband's anecdote but I'm borrowing it. Although it was unusual, my husband was actually befriended by one of the houseboys when we lived for a year in the Beijing Hotel. He was

invited over to dinner to a typical Chinese apartment a few times. The houseboy was after a U.S. visa, which he eventually got, but he also got into trouble over it. I accompanied my husband only once because the food was very oily and difficult for me to digest. The wife usually cooked the dinner, but one evening, she was not there so the daughter in the family cooked the meal. The “piece de resistance”, the highlight of the meal, was the Chinese delicacy known as “haishen,” or sea slugs. We knew this delicacy well since it is the most commonplace of all the banquet fare. Sea slugs, even when properly prepared, are almost inedible for most Westerners since they look and taste a bit like tires — a very rubbery texture. In this case, however, the sister — possibly new to cooking — had undercooked the slugs, which rendered them almost inedible. We had been taught in our Chinese culture class that it is very impolite to refuse food. However, a moment arose when all the Chinese tactfully left the room. My husband then distributed his remaining slugs among the host family's plates. They came back, savored the slugs and never said a word.

To avoid situations like this, one of the very few remaining Chinese phrases that I still command is, “Wo siji lai,” which means, “I will serve myself.” It was a most useful defense against unwanted delicacies piled on small plates by Chinese hosts.

After China, I went back to Washington for a domestic assignment because I was due for one. I had been overseas or studying a language for seven years.

Q: What was you Washington assignment?

ROMANSKI: I started out as the policy officer for Europe at Voice of America. I didn't really care for that assignment, so I managed to switch after about a year. I became a program officer for youth exchange at USIA, which was, and still is, located across the street from VOA. I was once again working on educational exchanges, this time on youth exchange.

Q: How did you find the jobs? The first one was . . . ?

ROMANSKI: Policy officer. It was actually quite boring. Some high level officials at Voice of America, or perhaps at State, had decided to run editorials stating the views of the U.S. Government on various issues. There were five Foreign Service officers located at VOA to read editorials, which other people had written, to check them for possible errors and for political content. If we had any questions, we would contact counterparts, most often at USIA, but sometimes at State. It had a nice title but it was a non-job. As soon as I discovered the nature of the job, I tried to find something more challenging.

Q: So you became a youth exchange officer? What was that about?

ROMANSKI: Youth exchange started because the director of USIA at that time was a great friend of President Reagan's. He was Charles Z. Wick. One of his big initiatives was launching a youth exchange. He believed that young people were key to the future and that too many of the other exchanges were geared towards old fuddy-duddies. He also wanted to leave his mark by launching something new. He started youth exchange programs with as many countries of the world as was politically feasible.

The largest program under this initiative still exists: it is the Congress-Bundestag Exchange, which involves a large number of German and American students, numbering in the hundreds. The German Government liked this program so much that they supported it very strongly — I'm referring to financial as well as moral support. The Germans pay a disproportionate share of the costs. The exchange involves high school students spending a year studying abroad and spending some time with the legislature in each country. This didn't happen to be my program, but it was the most important program in the office.

My beat was the rest of Europe, excluding Germany. One of my countries was the U.K. England had two priorities in youth exchanges with us. We were ahead of our time in arranging exchanges with Northern Ireland (where I unfortunately never traveled — the situation was still quite unsettled). The UK's other concern was anti-elitism, i.e. the priority was to arrange exchanges for working-class rather than academic youth. We had to

devise exchanges that would involve young people outside the normal parameters of exchange, since most countries prefer to exchange future leaders, often limited to elites. Britain wanted to get away from that.

Although I never got to travel there, I also handled Middle Eastern countries. Israel was one of my countries. It is the only time in my Foreign Service career that I have ever had anything to do with Israel. I think we may also have had a few exchanges with Jordan and possibly Egypt. They were just getting off the ground since there were political difficulties in launching them, even in those days. With Israel, there was no difficulty at all. Israel was only too happy to take and send as many young people as we could afford.

Q: This British program intrigues me. It's hard for us, I think, to reach down into what we would call the working class. The British kind of have definitions. People probably declare themselves to be working class. But we don't. How did you manage that?

ROMANSKI: That's right. We made an effort to recruit some inner-city school kids. We had a wide age range, including down to junior high. Some exchanges involved some less economically-advantaged Americans. This was good for both sides. One of other exchanges with England involved an exchange of deaf youth, although not necessarily economically disadvantaged. We conducted the exchange with Gallaudet. We were broadening the scope of exchanges quite a bit in those days, when there was the money for it.

Q: Coming out of all this, what was your impression of these programs?

ROMANSKI: I thought they were very good. Unlike the Fulbright program, which I also have a high regard for, youth exchange would often involve much larger numbers of students on exchanges for much shorter periods of time. The time frame for the Fulbright program at that time would be a minimum of six months, often a year. Extensions were often given. We would often exchange whole classrooms of kids for two weeks. Sometimes home hospitality was involved. The exchanges weren't necessarily all that

costly. The exchanges also didn't need to involve a large amount of travel, but they usually featured an academic or cultural component. From the contact I had with the limited number of groups I met, the results seemed to be quite positive. The young participants acquired a larger world view. These were very much people-to-people type exchanges.

Q: A little bit like the American Field Service.

ROMANSKI: Yes. We worked with Youth For Understanding, American Field Service and similar organizations. We would give the organization an additional grant for this special initiative.

Q: This is probably a good place to stop. We'll pick this up the next time, you had finished your job in Washington, I guess. And whither?

ROMANSKI: After Washington, I would go off to be an Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer, yet again, this time to Bonn. The pattern of my career was the Foreign Service equivalent of “always a bridesmaid, never a bride.”

Q: Did you feel this was partly because you were part of a tandem couple?

ROMANSKI: Yes, I very much feel that. There have been some very successful tandem couples, but in my particular case, I always felt that it was holding me back a bit. My husband probably felt the same way. I may have started out with ambitions, but I gradually lost those feelings as I saw the way my career was trending....

Today, a career like mine would be inconceivable. A great many junior positions, like ACAO, have been eliminated. What few remain might be reserved for first-tour officers. Nowadays, a second tour officer might be assigned as public affairs officer in Kyrgyzstan or Armenia. Why not?. During my time, when the Foreign Service was considerably larger and probably more bureaucratic, this wouldn't have been possible. It's a different kind of Foreign Service today: leaner, meaner and tighter.

Q: Well one has to look at this in the long run. I must say that as I do these oral history interviews, did you have fun while you were doing it?

ROMANSKI: Yes, I did. I mean the assignments that we have talked about so far: Hamburg, Warsaw, Beijing were all interesting each in its own way. Beijing was my favorite assignment because it was so different from what I had experienced up to that time. I also valued my career for its personal enrichment. I felt I was learning a lot, meeting all kinds of different people, visiting exotic locales — it seemed to be a great way to earn a living.

Q: Okay. Well, we'll pick this up the next time in 1983 or 84?

ROMANSKI: Let's see, it would be 1986 already.

Q: Okay we'll pick it up in 86 when you were off to Bonn.

Q: Today is the 11th of July, 2006. You are off to where?

ROMANSKI: Off to Bonn.

Q: You were in Bonn from when to when?

ROMANSKI: I was in Bonn for only one year, as it turned out. I had an assignment as Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer in Bonn. However, the position of America House Director and Branch Cultural Affairs Officer in Berlin unexpectedly became vacant in 1987 so I stayed in Bonn for only about a year.

Q: And you were your usual.

ROMANSKI: I had my usual position of Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer for the third and final time.

Q: In 86 and 87, how would you describe the situation of German-American relations at the time?

ROMANSKI: Relations were good. They were probably on the upswing. Of course, I was working in my own little area of specialization, which was not a good place to get an overview. The embassy in Bonn at that time was one of the two or three largest in the world. It was a very large embassy and very centralized. Everybody had his own little niche, with few of us having access to the big picture.

Q: We cannot look at 86 and 87 period and see a sudden upward blip in German-American relations because your time there . . .

ROMANSKI: No. Certainly not. Certainly nothing like that. Although I like to think that I did my little bit. Since Bonn was so large and specialized, I administered the country-wide speaker program. At that time, Germany still had a number of America Houses and German-American Institutes, some of which were destined to close fairly soon, within the next few years, but, for the time being, they were still open. If you have a facility, you need to have some activities taking place in it in order to attract audiences and get press attention. In order to keep the houses lively, we recruited American speakers, sometimes also embassy officers.

One of my initiatives was starting the Embassy speaker program. It would serve a dual purpose: providing relatively low-cost programs to the centers and giving Embassy colleagues a chance to travel outside of Bonn. One could also assume that they would be on message, i.e. have a good understanding of foreign policy. It was a way to better utilize resources. Not every officer was eligible for the speaker program and some who would have been good were too busy to participate. Although I arranged the travel of the speakers, I almost never got to travel with them because someone had to mind the shop back in Bonn. I did manage to attend most of the speaker programs in Bonn, which was the capital of Germany at the time. It was perhaps not a fascinating assignment, but I

enjoyed it. I felt I was doing something useful to foster U.S.- German exchanges, i.e. to promote mutual understanding. At that time, we were also allowed to program speakers who did not always espouse official U.S. Government policy. There was a little more leeway in those days. We valued our credibility more, a credibility we could demonstrate by presenting differing views.

Q: Can you think of any of the speakers or types of speakers you were getting, outside of the embassy ones?

ROMANSKI: I can't really remember that far back. Most of them were not big names. Many were academics. On the cultural side, we would occasionally program American writers. This kind of program would be popular with German audiences, especially with students and teachers, but even with ordinary German speakers who wanted to practice their English.. They would often turn up to hear this type of a speaker. I cannot remember a writer that we programmed in Bonn. When I got to Berlin, we programmed a number of American writers including Toni Morrison, who was our big name. She gave readings from her book, Beloved. She was a wonderful reader — her work really came to life as she read it. I had lunch with her and her agent. The foreign service is wonderful about providing once-in-a-lifetime opportunities like that.

In the area of foreign policy or economics, we tended to recruit professors. Germans complained that, in the field of economics, we would get too many theoreticians and too few practitioners. The USG couldn't afford practitioners. The honorarium was very low in those days. I think it was only 75 dollars per day plus per diem. Neither a top of the line economist nor a business person would come for that kind of money.

Q: Well, basically, weren't you relying on people on either a business or a vacation trip?

ROMANSKI: Well, yes. Or, in the case of academics, on Sabbaticals. Often the best speakers were those with their own reasons for coming, whom we would program time and time again. They would come to know the country and their audiences and regard it

as an enriching experience, although not necessarily in a financial sense. We also used a lot of the Fulbright professors who were in country. I believe that Germany has always had the largest Fulbright program in the world. So right off the bat, there were a few hundred people one could potentially tap into as speakers. Fulbrighters in Europe were often available as well — although not all of them were useful as potential speakers since they were in relatively obscure or very specialized fields. In addition, some Fulbrighters would want to research German topics, which would not be of much interest for us to program. We had to look for people working on American fields or with expertise on Country Plan-related objectives. This was never a very high percentage.

But to answer your question about the kind of people who would go on this program, often it would be people who developed a liking for the program, sometimes in other countries. We often managed to put together a good audience and have a stimulating discussion. One advantage of arranging events at an America House was that we could invite people from diverse circles and milieus, so that the speaker would be exposed to not just a university class, but would also encounter businessmen, government officials, academics, graduate students, etc. — that is when the program worked well. Most programs were by invitation only and limited to a select audience. Some, such as art exhibits or large lectures on popular topics, were open to the general public. In the early days, most programs had been public ones. By this time, we tried to target both our resources and audiences more carefully.

We also arranged programs for journalists. However, they preferred exclusives or one-on-one interviews. If we were fortunate, we could perhaps arrange an article about a speaker, although obviously not every speaker. Even though they didn't make money on it, some people considered the program a valuable opportunity to establish worthwhile contacts.

Q: And also, for a certain number of people, it's good on their resume.

ROMANSKI: Yes, I'm sure it was.

Q: How did you find the audiences? I take it there was no great hostility. Sometimes with the younger audiences twisting the eagle's tail can be a pastime. Did you find much of that?

ROMANSKI: Not really. Most Germans who had no interest in the United States or its positions would not bother to turn up for a program. The only times that I might run into anti-Americanism in Germany would be at an international forum. I can recall one time sitting at a diplomatic dinner and being seated next to a Green, or someone who was not very thrilled to find themselves next to an American diplomat, as if I might carry a contagion. Nonetheless, we made the best of it and had an interesting conversation, although I don't think anyone's mind was changed.

Q: This was the time, or close to it, when we had the debate over the SS-20s, the Soviet intermediate range missiles, and our response was putting in our own intermediate range Pershing missiles.

ROMANSKI: You are right. I don't remember that specific event, never having much expertise in arms control, but we were working on a number of arms control issues.

Q: It was more than arms control. The Soviets had introduced intermediate range missiles, the SS-20s, and were trying to say to the Europeans, "You are the target" - particularly the Germans - "and so you better get neutral because the United States isn't going to protect you." And we were saying, "To hell with you. We are putting in our own intermediate range missiles and then let's negotiate." And this was sort of the last offensive of the Soviet Union in Germany.

ROMANSKI: I remember that. It was the intermediate nuclear missiles. I remember the discussion that you are talking about. I'm quite sure we had speakers on the topic to try to persuade the Germans that it was in their interests to have intermediate missiles based in their country. I can't remember that we made tremendous headway, but it was an active

topic of discussion. I think we were more conscious of a Soviet threat than the Germans were, so that was another area where we would have disagreement and where we would perhaps want to bring in experts.

Q: The embassy in Bonn was huge at the time. Did you feel like a very small cog in a huge machine? Was it fun? How did you feel about it?

ROMANSKI: As I've already said, I was not in Bonn very long, so I enjoyed the brief period of time that I was there. I was just a very small cog in the machine. One of the things that was nice about Bonn — or perhaps not so nice for some people — was that we lived in a housing compound in an area called Plittersdorf. I found out that one of my colleagues walked to work rather than undertaking an unpleasant drive in rush hour traffic or riding the crowded Embassy shuttle bus: everybody left and returned at the more or less the same time. Encouraged by his example, I began walking to work at the embassy. I found it very relaxing and a beautiful way to start the day.

Both the housing compound and the embassy were located on the Rhine. It was a beautiful walk. I later found out that crime went up and it was no longer considered safe to walk. Some people rode their bicycles, which would have been safer. I didn't enjoy riding a bicycle nearly as much as walking because it was not nearly as relaxing. It was a wonderful way to start the day and I very much missed it when I moved on to my next post.

I was separated from my husband — not in any legal sense but by assignment. My husband was in Warsaw at the time because we could not get a tandem assignment together. The closest I could get was Germany while he served in Poland, but I made friends, got to know people and led a relatively satisfying life for that one year.

The U.S. ambassador to Germany at that time was a political appointee: Richard Burt. Needless to say, at a large embassy like that, I had almost no contact with him. I remember him largely for two reasons. The first is that on Shrove Tuesday (the day before Ash Wednesday — the beginning of Lent), there is a tradition in Cologne (which has the

reputation of being a fun- loving city located in the Catholic part of the country) that women can cut off men's ties. (I won't go into the symbolism.) In any case, the Ambassador had heard of this tradition but his DCM — Jim Dobbins — had not. So, the Ambassador, who had purposely worn an expendable tie on that day, encouraged his secretaries to cut off the DCM's tie. They didn't want to do it, but he made them. The DCM had worn quite a good tie that day and was obviously displeased, but didn't say or do anything. It was the Ambassador's wish after all, if a somewhat mean one.

The other thing that I remember about Ambassador Burt was the July 4th reception. In Germany, the Fourth of July receptions were quite a big deal and anyone who was anyone wanted to get an invitation. I was quite surprised, therefore, to attend the reception and discover that it had been catered by McDonald's, Dunkin' Donuts and similar American venders. Apparently, the Admin Officer leaned on various American food chains to provide free fare for the event as publicity and, remarkably, they all did it. It created a rather bizarre menu, but the high-level Germans seemed to enjoy it — probably more than I did. It was the one time of year when I knew I would ingest (and hopefully digest) junk food.

This event provided quite a contrast to the 4th of July reception in Warsaw, where as in Germany, it was a much sought-after invitation. Since these were commie times, there were no American vendors to recruit and the Ambassador's representational fund had to cover everything. The Ambassador's residence was not nearly as large as the one in Germany, but the invitation was at least as coveted. The result was that all Embassy officers had to work three two-hour shifts on that holiday. By working, I mean that we had to stand the whole time and chat up the Poles (who were invited in three shifts, although many overstayed their welcome). I would get so tired of standing the whole time in my high heels that, in the later hours of the event, I would practically drag any woman I could find to come sit with me inside just so that I could rest my feet a bit. I grew to resent our national holiday when I was in the foreign service. It was anything but a holiday.

Poles in those days, and perhaps now, tended to overstay their welcome at the Ambassador's because there was free booze. Of course, the bar would close down when it came time for guests to leave, but this was often not enough of an incentive. Each of the two ambassadors I served with had his own way of signaling the end of the party. Ambassador Richard T. Davies would flip the lights on and off which was the signal for us to start escorting the guests out as efficiently as we could. Ambassador William Schaufele, on the other hand, had an even more effective signal. He would simply unleash his large German shepherd who would bound down the stairs, barking noisily, and start mingling with the remaining guests, who would generally not remain too much longer.

Q: Then in '87 you are off to Berlin.

ROMANSKI: Right.

Q: And you were there until when?

ROMANSKI: I was there until 1991. My assignment would normally have ended in '90, which would have made it a four-year tour, the longest allowed. However, Foreign Service Personnel made an exception for two reasons. One was that my husband managed to get an assignment for himself in Berlin, but he didn't arrive there until '88. I was allowed to extend so that our tours would end at the same time. The Foreign Service was understanding in terms of trying to keep tandems together — it was after all the policy. Since I had transferred from Bonn to Berlin, it wasn't like five years at the same post. I was in the same country but not in the same place or position.

Q: What was your job?

ROMANSKI: In Berlin, my assignment was much more interesting. I was the America House Director and the Branch Cultural Affairs Officer. Bonn had been a very large post, perhaps 20 officers just within USIS. Berlin was much smaller in those days. There were just three officers: the Public Affairs Officer, the Information Officer and myself. I combined

the functions of cultural affairs officer with the America House director job. The positions had been separate at one time, but had been downsized into just the one.

Q: Who was the head of the mission?

ROMANSKI: The Minister was Harry Gilmore.

Q: You arrived there in 87. Was there the feeling that the Germanys were going to remain separate? Or were people saying, “Oh, the wall is going to come down?”

ROMANSKI: The thing I found so astonishing when I got to Berlin and saw the wall was that nobody I knew, including people at the embassy, gave any indication that the two Germanys were going to unite and that the wall would come down. I'm very skeptical when I hear the many people who now say they knew all along that the wall would fall, that they had foreseen it. I agree that it was bound to happen sooner or later, but no one of my acquaintance, German or American, predicted that it would happen as soon as it did.

Q: I've interviewed a good number of people. One was our ambassador to East Germany at the time. He said he remembered in the spring of '89 telling his wife, “This must be the more boring job in the world.” And this was just before all hell broke loose. Some people have said that Vernon Walters was saying that the situation was not going to last.

ROMANSKI: That could very well be. I knew the ambassador slightly, but we didn't have an extensive amount of contact.

Q: This wasn't something he was announcing. But some people who knew him as DCM and all. But by other people's account, he seemed to be the one person who was raising the question.

ROMANSKI: That certainly could be. Someone at that level with a wide range of contacts who knew Germany well, as Ambassador Walters did, could very well make that claim credibly. None of the people that I knew could. I even remember the very night that the

wall came down. I happened to be attending a reception at the Aspen Institute, which always attracted a good, high-level audience of researchers, think-tankers, government officials, etc. I talked to a lot of people because I had many contacts by then. Nobody gave any indication. Nobody said anything. Nobody rushed home. So, although there are all these people who claimed to know the wall was coming down, I didn't know them and I don't number in their ranks.

Q: I haven't run across any either. Well, how did you find your work in Berlin?

ROMANSKI: It was interesting. I enjoyed it. It was my largest supervisory job. The America Houses, as you probably know, have quite an interesting history. There had once been hundreds of them after World War II, because they were considered a democracy-building institution funded by the U.S. Government. However, by the mid to late '80s, their number had dwindled to only a handful and that handful was destined to dwindle still further. America Houses were once quite self-sufficient with numerous employees. They had multi-faceted operations, including their own print shops. In Berlin at this time, there were over twenty employees. I was their boss. For a short while, I even supervised an ABCAO, that is to say an Assistant Branch Cultural Affairs Officer to promote exchange programs with former East Germany.

We tried to run a fairly active program in the America House so that we could attract audiences to it. We had a library. We had the speaker program that I had run out of Bonn. It continued with someone else in charge. We had art exhibitions and various other kinds of activities. Since the building was so large, we shared it with a couple of like-minded organizations, such as one which promoted study in the United States. My job was partly administrative and partly substantive. It was busy, but a great job.

Q: Was there much contact with academic institutions there?

ROMANSKI: Yes. We had a lot of contact with the Free University of Berlin. They had a very large American Studies department called the Kennedy Institute. We programmed speakers at both the Institute and the America House to attract audiences to the facility.

Q: Were East Germans able to get across at all?

ROMANSKI: No, not before the wall came down. We never had any contact with East Germans. In fact, there was a separate USIS operation at the time over at the embassy in East Berlin. They had their own public affairs operation which included some of the same activities. We met them. Shortly after I arrived, the Cultural Affairs Officer from the East came over and introduced himself. We talked about sharing some resources, which of course mostly meant sharing my resources since we were better funded. But I didn't mind — I was happy to help out, plus I don't remember that we cooperated all that much.

One of the things that was interesting about Berlin in the old days was that I had quite a lot to do with the British and the French cultural officers. This harkened back to the old quadripartite days, agreements and traditions. We actually had cultural lunches. I never had more contact with cultural officer counterparts than I did in Berlin. It was encouraged. The public affairs officer, the officers in the political and economic sections — everyone pursued his own contacts up to and including the ministers. There was a lot of official camaraderie in those days: the good old days.

I was once taken for a helicopter ride over the city by one of the political officers with liaison functions to the military. I could see the at-that-time still intact Berlin Wall dividing the city. It was a fascinating shot from the air — even if it was not like the Great Wall of China which could be seen from space. I also visited the Berlin Documentation Center with one of our visitors. This was fascinating as well because we were shown documents on which individuals were classified according to their degree of “Aryan-ness.” In other words, an individual with blond hair and blue eyes would of course be closer to the Aryan Nazi ideal than someone with dark hair and brown eyes. It was a very highly graduated

system. I had never seen anything like it, but it did provide insight into Nazi thinking and record-keeping. Until the fall of the wall, we were in charge of the Documentation Center, eventually the documents were turned over to the Germans and people could file applications to see their files.

Q: Was there any feeling that you were under siege? Or had that gone away?

ROMANSKI: Going into East Berlin was never particularly pleasant. There was only one checkpoint we could use: “Checkpoint Charlie.” I think there was a way of going over using the S-Bahn system, but I never did it because it was very complicated and I was afraid of somehow doing the wrong thing, getting into trouble and causing an incident. The Cold War kind of mentality still lingered.

Berlin is a very large city but we could only move around in the western part. We couldn't even drive to a city that was relatively close by — like Hanover — because one would have to cross East Germany to get there. Occasionally, one could develop a bit of island fever if one failed to schedule a vacation or trip to the West regularly enough.

One of the nice things that I alluded to when we were talking about Hamburg was that USIS Germany regularly arranged conferences for its officers. I've mentioned them before. These usually took place in Bonn but might occasionally be held in Berlin or at one of the other America Houses. This gave one an opportunity to get out of Berlin on official business. Otherwise, it would be vacation travel or waiting for the wall to come down, which actually happened sooner than most of us had expected.

Q: You mentioned the Aspen Institute. What was this?

ROMANSKI: Berlin was a very large city with a number of U.S. universities and similar institutions such as the Aspen Institute. Some of these organizations would try to do some of the same things we did such as programs for opinion makers. They were not official U.S. Government entities, more like think tanks. They would cater to visiting groups. They

might conduct exchange programs. We had a fair amount of contact with like-minded institutions like the Aspen Institute.

Q: A friend of mine who served with me in Belgrade, David Anderson . . .

ROMANSKI: He may have been there at the time. I have certainly met him. He later I think became the director of the Aspen Institute, didn't he?

Q: Were you getting enough funds? Charlie Wick was still in charge, right?

ROMANSKI: Well, one of the reasons why the U.S. Government had been closing America Houses was because they were extremely expensive to run. First of all, there was the facility itself, which was a fossil from the early '60s. It had been built to hold more than a hundred employees, but we were down to about 20 or so. One could rattle around in the building. It wasn't even the cost of the building itself. A lot of German towns with America Houses were so desperate to keep an American presence that they would often offer the facility rent free or for minimal rent. This didn't include the upkeep of the building of course, but at least one didn't have to pay rent for a prime downtown location.

Even this support wasn't enough because the most expensive element of the operation was not the facility itself but the German FSN staff. When I started my career in Hamburg, my first post as a junior officer, every one in the America House, no matter what his position — and I include the janitor — earned far more than I did. The America House in Hamburg was co-located with part of the University of Hamburg, both to cut costs and also as a natural programming venue. Hamburg University actually paid the janitor's salary.

By this time, a few promotions later, I could no longer say that I was the most poorly paid person in the America House, however the FSNs were still an enormous expense. USIS employed very well qualified FSNs for the most part, many with PhDs. Almost all of them, except for technical people, spoke fluent English. This kind of employee expected and deserved a good salary. We were paying competitive wages.

Q: How did you find the impact of technology? This was still the early days of the computer, the word processor and all.

ROMANSKI: As far as office technology went, it was still in a developmental stage. Our technology worked all right. USIS at the time was separate, so we had our own system. The part of the operation that we never were able to successfully computerize, despite numerous attempts, was the invitation and audience record retrieval system known as ARS. Although many tried, it remained a nightmare.

Q: What does ARS mean?

ROMANSKI: It's a way the government, in this case USIA, tries to demonstrate its effectiveness. It preceded GIPRA — I've forgotten what the acronym stands for at this point, the Al Gore initiative. Even before it had been officially launched by Al Gore or anyone else, we were constantly trying to demonstrate our effectiveness bolstered by a slew of attractive statistics. Not just anecdotes, not just hearsay such as, “I was talking with Professor Schmidt of the Free University and he said the program with Professor Jones from Georgetown was the best thing he ever went to.” That's fine, but one can't quantify that. USIS officers were always trying to find ways of proving that we were successful in an effort to win minds and hearts so that we could avoid the inevitable budget cuts. However, ARS was never an effective means of doing this — although it did soak up many man hours. In the many years of exposure that I had with the program in Germany, we never got the system to work as it was intended to do.

With ARS, we would always feed information into the system, but it would stubbornly balk at giving us anything useful in return. It was a wonderful make-work project, but a very dull one for the poor Germans who actually worked with it. This was an instance where technology failed. Ever so often someone would come in and say, “This system is worthless. We've got to overhaul it.” So it would begin anew, but however good the intentions were, they never worked out.

On the speaker program, one innovation which was introduced and later abandoned — although there had been an initial flurry of excitement — was the so-called “electronic dialogues.” These were basically trans-Atlantic telephone calls, eventually with a television connection where one could see the person via satellite link-up. These eventually developed into WorldNets, with two-way video connections. For a while, these were all the vogue. Ultimately, they did not prove as satisfying as having a live body, someone with whom one could exchange business cards or invite to lunch. Interest in WorldNets eventually died down, as is often the case with new technology.

Q: Who was coming to the America House?

ROMANSKI: It varied according to the program and the speaker. Luncheon programs were still quite popular because even busy Germans would need to take time for lunch. We would arrange a guest speaker to give a presentation over sandwiches or a simple meal. Afterwards, those who wanted could mingle and chat. These were quite successful, depending on how good the speaker was, how much of a reputation he or she had, and how many programs there were in a given month. This approach was less successful in Berlin than in Munich, because Berlin is such a large city that it is difficult to get round quickly. Geography was working against us.

Q: Let's go to the fall of 89. What were you experiencing?

ROMANSKI: It was very exciting when the wall came down. To tell the truth, as much as I enjoyed being in Western Europe, the work had gotten to be fairly boring, fairly routine after a while. It was not exciting, certainly not cutting edge, especially in a country as centralized and bureaucratic as the USIS operation in Germany tended to be. There was not a lot of initiative one could bring to the job.

All that changed once the wall came down because the country opened up. We not only could, but we were even encouraged to travel to formerly closed cities in East Germany.

We began to get lots of visitors from East Berlin visiting our library for the first time, which was much better than the small one they had at the embassy in East Berlin. It may have been almost like the old days after World War II, where there would be dozens of people in the library instead of a handful. The librarians became quite inspired. We had one library patron return a book that he had borrowed years ago before the wall had gone up. The book was no good to us any more, outdated, but it made a wonderful anecdote. I remember that we had to send the book back to USIA headquarters and it may have wound up on the Director's desk for all I know.

The fall of the wall was also very good for my German language use. Many West German contacts spoke excellent English, which meant that they would want to speak English with you. This was not the case with East Germans, who rarely knew English. This gave a good boost to my German language ability. It was stimulating to meet people who had never met an American before, who might be relatively fascinated by one. It was almost like being back in the Soviet Union again.

Another result of the fall of the wall was that Secretary of State James A. Baker started coming at least once a year. Of course, this may also have been the result of moving the capital of Germany from Bonn to Berlin. I remember a discussion I had with my senior FSN in Bonn, who was sure that they would never move the capital. I think it was just wishful thinking on his part. Unlike my Bonn FSNs, I was certain the capital would be moved to Berlin, which is much more of a capital city than Bonn. I was right. It made me glad that my analysis of a German political situation was more astute than a senior FSN, at least in this instance.

Q: Was there a quick adjustment of plans and programs?

ROMANSKI: Not really. With an operation so bureaucratic and centralized, it takes a while to adjust. It was a rather gradual adjustment. USIA decided to open a new post in Leipzig with an America House director, much like myself, who was also a Branch Public Affairs

Officer. This cut off a lot of our turf. Previously, we had been the only operation in the east — now we were only responsible for East Berlin and the northern part of East Germany. It continued to be a challenge and we tried to adjust our programming fairly quickly, but it took time. We were also trying to promote contacts between the east and the west in an American context.

Q: Were you finding through your contacts and your Foreign Service national employees that the East Germans were really a different breed of cat?

ROMANSKI: On the whole, they got along well. Probably better than West Germans meeting East Germans in general. I don't recall any great difficulties. Naturally it was an adjustment. For example, there was one person in the America House in West Berlin whose main job was providing American Studies materials to the Free University and to teachers of English and American literature in German gymnasia. She had to adjust her focus quite drastically. There weren't very many teachers of English in East Germany: the language of choice was Russian.

The East Germans tried to re-program teachers of Russian, so we would arrange programs for them. The Russian and English languages are not very similar — nor are the literatures and cultures. Eventually a lot of these teachers were forced to retire or were replaced by younger teachers of English language and American English. It was a gradual change. Some of the initial programs for the gymnasium teachers in former East Germany, who didn't know much about the United States and hadn't much English language, could be quite challenging and interesting.

Q: Did you get out there and hammer on the wall? Did you join in the general festivities?

ROMANSKI: Not a whole lot. The wall came down during the night and we didn't even know about it. Fortunately, we turned on the news and soon went out to mingle with the multitudes. I can definitely verify that there really was this tremendous feeling of euphoria. I can add something else, and I don't consider myself particularly prophetic, this great

feeling of good will with people giving flowers to one another and streaming across the wall — I knew that feeling could not last, that problems would arise sooner or later. It turned out to be sooner. Not in terms of U.S. relations with Germany so much, but in terms of German-German relations.

As far as hammering on the wall, we weren't allowed to (although some in the military did it). However, pieces of the wall were soon on the local market. We still have a few as souvenirs, but we bought them.

I'd like to talk a little bit more about some of the changes that occurred when the wall came down. Our status as one of the Quadripartite powers changed. We had been used to getting more invitations than one could count, even at our level. It was a very active life — Americans were in demand. That all changed once the Wall came down. It was no longer our city. On the other hand, my husband and I really enjoyed the wonderful cultural life of Berlin, which had just been enriched by the removal of the wall. The city at the time had three opera companies, a half dozen symphony orchestras, over twenty theaters, dozens of museums. It was amazing. Since I was cultural officer, I was often able to acquire hard-to-get tickets — not free of course, but I could at least use my connections to buy them.

Berlin had a rich and varied cultural life. It had its own Film Festival. The US Government didn't have to provide speakers because they came on their own. I remember attending an official lunch at which I recognized the film star Denzel Washington before he became a big name. I identified him by name, he heard me, came up and chatted with us briefly. My FSNs were quite thrilled even though this was before he had won an Oscar and become a big star. He was there to promote the film “Glory.”

During another Festival, I remember meeting the director Oliver Stone, who was promoting his film Platoon at the Festival. He was desperate to get a glass of wine which I managed to snag for him at the heavily-attended but poorly-serviced official reception. Berlin was

an interesting place to serve both before and after the wall came down, but interesting in different ways.

Q: Both in Bonn to Berlin, were you seeing a new German coming along? You know, younger people coming up who no longer remembered America's role . . . ?

ROMANSKI: That was particularly true in Berlin. Some of the old contacts remembered the days of the Berlin air lift, however, we were often dealing with people who had been born after it had taken place. The Germans have been criticized for not teaching about the World War II years, the Hitler era and Nazi crimes very rigorously. Younger people would have no recollection of those years and, correspondingly, no particular reason to feel any kind of gratitude towards Americans. There was a memory gap. The younger generation was definitely growing up more critical of Americans than the older generation was.

In a way, it was quite ironic. Younger Germans, often rightly so, were often quite critical of Americans for historically mistreating Afro-Americans and American Indians. Nonetheless, most of them had a real blind spot with regard to their own Nazi past, about which most of them knew very little. The American TV series “Roots” was very popular in Germany, but there was nothing equivalent about the Holocaust period. It's a truism that it is far easier to be critical of other people's cultures than one's own, far easier to turn a critical eye on one's neighbor than oneself.

As I previously discussed, both the U.S. and the German governments, were trying to counter this attitude with massive exchanges of young people. The exchanges would hopefully foster positive experiences. They were trying to train cadres of people who would have good feelings about the U.S. or Germany for the future, as well as firsthand knowledge of the country. The U.S. still considered Germany its most important ally at the time, in some ways even more so than the UK.

Q: Was there any concern at the time about what would happen with Soviet troops?

ROMANSKI: Actually, there was quite a bit of concern about whether they would actually leave. I think it was the Germans who subsidized their departure, didn't they? The Soviets did not have any money to pay for their return to the USSR. Plus many of the troops did not really want to leave.

Q: They didn't?

ROMANSKI: Well, compare the lucky people who served in East Germany with those who are now serving in places like Chechnya. You could only imagine how reluctant they would be to leave. Life was good. Nothing much happened. It was light duty. There might have been very rare anti-Soviet demonstrations, but I never heard of anything very serious. Many left reluctantly. Life in the USSR was no picnic.

We had problems with our troops in those days. Officially, the Germans wanted us to stay. Unofficially, there were little tensions, little incidents. It was not regarded as an unmixed blessing.

Q: Well, of course, there was a rather major withdrawal of U.S. troops which moved via the Persian Gulf to participate in the war against Iraq and then back to the United States. How did the Gulf War play out?

ROMANSKI: I don't remember that there was a great deal of reaction against the Iraq war compared to, let's say, the Vietnam war or, I'm sure, the current Iraq war. After all, Iraq was the aggressor and had attacked Kuwait. Germany was as dependent on Middle Eastern oil as anyone — even more so than we were. There was interest in getting the situation resolved quickly. Germans may have thought that the U.S. made its move rather abruptly, but I remember support for this particular action. Germany was an important NATO member and NATO supported the invasion.

Q: They did. Well, you went there in 91?

ROMANSKI: Yes.

Q: And then where did you go?

ROMANSKI: I went back to Washington.

Q: What were you doing there?

ROMANSKI: I was Centers Management Coordinator. My position in Germany had actually qualified me for this assignment because I had been running a cultural center. However, in this particular position, I would have much more contact with binational centers than with U.S. Government cultural centers, however, I didn't know this at the time of the assignment.

Q: I think this is a good place to stop. We'll pick this up in 1991, when you were going to be centers management coordinator.

Q: Today is the 18th of July 2005. Anna, you were back in the department, USIA, from when to when?

ROMANSKI: I was at USIA for this Washington tour from 1991 through 1996. I was back five years. For the first for two years, I worked in the Centers Management Coordinator job. Then I switched assignments to Career and Assignments counselor in the USIA personnel division. USIA was still separate from the State Department at that time, although rumors of consolidation were rife: there were more and more as time went on. The rumors proved right.

Q: In 1991, where were the binational centers?

ROMANSKI: Most of the binational centers were located in Latin America. They still are. There were also a few in Europe — a number of these in Germany. As we discussed earlier, after the second world war, the United States wanted to democratize Germany.

Library of Congress

We opened up a lot of U.S. Government centers at the time. There were hundreds of them originally, even in some very small towns. Naturally, most of these closed over the years. The more important ones, such as the ones in Berlin, Munich, Frankfurt or Hamburg became America Houses. There were other ones in smaller towns like Nuremburg or Kiel. The U.S. Government did not feel it was in its interest to keep up the payment on these cultural centers. However, if the Germans were willing to run them, the U.S. Government was, for a while, willing to give a certain amount of support. The arrangement changed over the years. For a while, the director was often an American director, although not a Foreign Service officer.

These centers were known as German American Institutes or GAIs for short. They basically did what America Houses did, but with a much greater emphasis on culture and, in some cases, language teaching. GAIs always had a library and the library was very important. The institutes offered student counseling services. They also did some programming on substantive issues, but they tended to prefer soft programming on fluffier issues. Many had quite active film programs. Some centers programmed music. The programming would depend on the director and his or her contacts as well as how long he or she had been in the community. The center in Cologne, for example, had a German director who was interested in art and who arranged quite wonderful exhibits but rarely featured American art, which was too difficult or expensive to get. A GAI could create its own unique profile. As the years went by and budgets grew tighter, U.S. Government support for the centers decreased until it dwindled to almost nothing except for maybe a few thousand dollars for the library so that it could keep up U.S. magazine subscriptions or purchase other items unavailable on the European market.

When I was running the speaker program out of Bonn (this likely continues to the present day), the Embassy would provide speakers to the German-American Institutes. Some of these speakers would be U.S. Government officials but most were not. Even the ambassador might visit a German-American Institute upon occasion if it suited his schedule. Some of the GAIs, for example the one in Nuremburg, became quite interested

in promoting trade and developed quite a good working relationship with the Foreign Commercial Service.

Returning to the question of where we had centers, we also had a few binational centers in Pakistan of all places. When I started the assignment, I had a boss who loved binational centers because he had spent most of his career in Latin America and knew how important they were in that part of the world — trying to counter anti-Americanism. I should explain that Latin American centers were not like the centers I have been describing in Germany. Most of them taught English — not always terribly well but well enough to suit the local population. USIA had an English teaching cone, a corps of professional English teaching officers, who would often consult with and help the binational centers, but they would not teach at them. The U.S. Government could not afford a contribution as great as that. The English Teaching Officers might organize programs or conferences, supply text books or test materials, etc. but they wouldn't be running the show.

For my first year on the job, I mentioned that I had a boss who loved binational centers, called BNCs. So that I could gain familiarity with the centers, he sent me on my one and only U.S. Government trip to Latin America. I visited the BNCs in Central America because they were located relatively close geographically. It was not possible to visit all the ones in South America as there were simply too many of them. Central America featured binational centers in every country except Panama (which surprised me given strong US links to the country). The history of binational centers in Latin America perhaps may be linked to periodic waves of anti-Americanism. Binational centers often ran into financial difficulty as their main source of income was teaching English. Not every BNC was able to make a go of it. Some binational centers would close for a while and then re-open under new management. I was told that binational centers were — at least in Latin America — harder to kill than vampires. I don't know whether that is still true. I also don't know how many of them have survived to this day.

My boss believed that a lot of the centers had serious management problems. Personnel were often entrenched. The directors were usually directors for life. Binational centers usually had boards that rarely changed members and were wedded to the status quo. This is also a problem with Fulbright Commissions and other kinds of institutions, in particular binational ones, in which there is not a lot of circulation — not a lot of new blood or new ideas, as this might shake things up too much. Nonetheless, it was often considered prestigious to serve on a binational board, especially as one rarely had to actually do anything. A good BNC board would have been active in fund raising or finding new money-making activities but, for most centers, this was rarely the case.

Q: Were you keeping a general eye on things?

ROMANSKI: No. In the old days before my time, the office was quite large and the job significant. I would have even had my own budget to dispense. Alas, by the time I came to the job, the office was but a shade of its former self. The office consisted of me and a very minimal budget. The office was no longer in the business of giving grants, as it once had. We were more in the business of trying to give advice — and you can imagine how welcome advice without money is.

My boss tasked me with coming up with ways I could help the centers short of doling out funds, since I didn't have any to give out. I couldn't give them the one thing they really wanted and needed. Instead, I had to come up with things BNCs might not want but would at least accept. We started a newsletter for all the centers — binational and US Government ones. All centers received it. Its purpose was to offer ideas and exchange best practices. If a binational center had a money-making idea, it could be shared with other centers through this medium. The other method we came up with to promote centers was a film, a documentary about binational centers.

For the film, I selected one binational center in three different parts of the world where centers are located. We chose the binational center in San Jose, Costa Rica because it

was considered a model center. Bangkok was selected in East Asia because its binational center was quite famous. Barcelona was selected as the European center. I think only the three countries featured in the film were at all interested in it — they may have actually used it as promotion or whatever. Nonetheless, it was an interesting assignment for me. For the first time in a long time, I felt like I was doing something creative. I'm not sure how useful it was for the binational centers and I probably have the sole existing copy of the video recording, but I considered it a worthwhile undertaking. I wrote the script and edited the film with the help of Worldnet TV. The film director I worked with was a very nice guy, but he had other priorities so it was always hard to get him to work on this particular project. Nonetheless, I managed to complete it.

The publication that I started was called Centers Update; it was shipped through the pouch. It went not only to binational centers but to all USIS cultural operations at various embassies. Feedback, such as there was, was generally good although I do not know how useful the publication actually was. I am quite sure that when I left the job after two years, the publication was immediately discontinued and most likely not missed.

Q: Was this an era when something for bored students to do was go down and stone the American cultural center?

ROMANSKI: In various parts of the world, some binational centers had been closed due to violence. This was even true for the America Houses — especially during the Vietnam War years. America Houses at that time didn't have windows, only plywood boards. Eventually, these were replaced by very thick Plexiglas that one could barely see through and which scratched easily. Security was an important consideration even in those days, but it was not the kind of security we have now. We were only concerned about mobs of students, not trained terrorists.

Returning to my one orientation trip to Latin America, I saw centers in operation and could get a feel for their individual characteristics as well as how well run they were and their

relationships with the embassies in the countries. In general, the better centers tended to have good relations with their embassies. These centers were often located in the capital city. Some of the more distant centers were less frequented and, perhaps, had a greater tendency to become weak links — not necessarily highly regarded. There were exceptions.

Brazil was the one country that I regret not visiting since my pro-BNC chief Carl Howard only stayed in that job for one year. Not surprisingly perhaps since it is such a large country, it had the most binational centers of any country in the world. I would have loved to have visited them, but it never happened.

My office director did propose sending me out to the far-flung Southeast Asian and East Asian binational centers, but I calculated that I would have spent three times as much time on the plane or waiting for a flight as I would have actually spent visiting a binational center. It simply was not a good use of my time nor of the U.S. Government's money. It was horrendously expensive as there were no direct flights between Bangkok and Karachi.. Flights were also infrequent, perhaps once or twice a week. The idea was so impractical that even the director agreed to scrap it. As a result, I never got to see those fascinating and, in some cases, struggling centers in Pakistan or Thailand.

Q: Did you get any feel for that the influence of the United States abroad was beginning to wane or to wax?

ROMANSKI: One of the bones of contention with the binational centers — this was true even in Germany — was that they did not view themselves as mouthpieces for the U.S. Government. Far from it. If the U.S. Government were smart, it wouldn't want them to be. Let's face it, they were being run by some sort of pick-up crew whose idea of U.S. Government policy may not have been all that accurate. The best relationship would be one of cooperation in areas of mutual interest. In some cases in Latin America, binational centers actually became anti-American. This was obviously not something that the U.S.

Government would favor: support would be cut to such renegades. It is possible that we would try to use our influence in the region to close them down, set up a rival organization or deal with them in some fashion.

Generally speaking, the BNCs were viewed as independent. They cherished their identities. Their identity with the country in which they were located was of course much stronger than with a distant United States. Ninety percent or maybe even one hundred-percent of the board were prominent citizens from that country. If we were lucky, these board members might include former pro-American government officials, successful businessmen and possibly Fulbright alumni or academics who had studied in the U.S. — in theory, people with some tie to the U.S. There was never a question of divided loyalties: loyalty was due to the BNC's home country. As the U.S. Government increasingly decreased its level of support, this was resented and ties weakened further. The binational centers would see absolutely no reason to energetically support U.S. policies when they viewed themselves as getting little or nothing for serving as advocates.

Q: What was your impression of our embassies? How did they feel about this?

ROMANSKI: I can only speak for Germany and Latin America. Germany was very pro-German-American Institutes — at least the ones that were well run. The Kennedy House in Kiel was always in danger of closing and may have reduced its hours per week to something like ten. It was hard to have a lot of enthusiasm for an organization of limited usefulness. Generally speaking, the more successful German-American Institutes — the one in Nuremburg, for example — were well regarded and well supported by almost all U.S. ambassadors in Germany.

In Latin America, I can only really speak for Central America where I visited. Once again, our embassies tended to support the centers quite well. The cultural affairs officer's portfolio usually included contact with and, to some extent, support for the binational center. Embassies would try to schedule appropriate events at the centers. Often English

tests, like the TOEFL or the SAT, might be held there. If the embassies voiced criticisms, they would generally run along the lines that the BNCs were outdated and irrelevant. But no one that I ever talked to at the embassies, nor for that matter at USIA, would say that we should put more money into them. Although, in fact, with the war on terrorism now, there has been a whole rethinking of the value of centers. Some of them might have had a greater role to play today, but at this time, they were largely regarded as vestiges of the past. Binational centers served as a way for the U.S. Government to reach out to the man in the street when we still considered that an important function. In the old days, we cared about students, even high school students. Many binational centers in Latin America even arranged programs for grade school students as anachronistic as that may seem now. It was a self-sustaining kind of program that could either be easily ignored or gently stimulated as the priorities of the U.S. Government changed.

Before leaving BNCs for good, I should mention that in my second year on the job, I continued issuing Centers Update, completed work on the binational center documentary, and instituted a BNC award program with a small cash award for the best BNC employees. I awarded about ten of these 1000 dollar awards from my very small budget. The awards were popular — I received a number of nominations — as well as long overdue. My initiatives were never recognized, unfortunately. BNCs were regarded as just too much a thing of the past — and those who worked with them as well.

Q: You were doing this until when?

ROMANSKI: I did this from 1991 to '93. So it would have been more than ten years ago.

Q: And this was before the Clinton administration.

ROMANSKI: That's right. It was before the Clinton administration.

Q: Clinton administration came in in '93 and you moved on to personnel, is that right?

ROMANSKI: Right. I moved on to personnel in 1993.

Q: And you were there for . . . ?

ROMANSKI: I worked in foreign service personnel for four years.

Q: What sort of things were you doing in personnel?

ROMANSKI: My original job title was career counselor. While I was in personnel, it was decided that this title was misleading since it implied that I was counseling people on their career choices and options. That was not the case. My job was changed to simply assignments counselor. On my side of the shop, I had to find assignments for USIA officers or, very occasionally, an excursion tour for a State Department officer or civil servant. In the case of the civil servant, it would most likely be for hard-to-fill posts. That was my main job, but I had other responsibilities as well.

At first, I only handled assignments for tenured officers grades one to four. However, after the assignments counselor for incoming and junior officer position was eliminated in one of the downsizing exercises so prevalent in those years, the junior officers were divided among the remaining assignments counselors. All of us had to start dealing with the junior officers, which was not really so difficult. I also had the responsibility for finding assignments for administrative specialists and secretaries. This was actually very challenging because, unfortunately, especially in the case of the secretaries, USIA's budget in those years kept getting severely cut. One of the very first positions that even a large post like London would cut would most likely be the American secretary for the public affairs officer. The post viewed this as preferable to eliminating an assistant cultural affairs officer or an assistant information officer. The secretarial cone was never very large — perhaps, 18 USIA secretaries for 12 jobs. That part of the job was particularly difficult.

Q: You were there when the talk about eliminating USIA got stronger and stronger.

ROMANSKI: Oh, it did. This was like a first wave. You could see the USIA jobs going. The writing was on the wall. One of the first things that happened affected the junior officers. Junior officer positions were being cut since it would not be logical to have an assistant cultural affairs officer but no cultural affairs officer. They were as expendable as the secretaries, probably more so in some cases.

There were four USIA assignments counselors and each of us was responsible for about 20 junior officers. For one particular cycle, we had to persuade about fifty percent of them, or about ten junior officers, to transfer immediately to the State Department as JOTs. I never really had to twist anybody's arm, I'm glad to say. I must have presented the case so convincingly that a good number of JOTs at that time opted voluntarily to transfer to the State Department as State junior officer trainees rather remain with USIA. I have no way of knowing how well they did, but I think it was probably a wise decision in the long run and gave them a leg up. At least, that was the way I saw it at the time. Many of them probably saw it the same way. Unlike myself, they did not have a lot of time invested in USIA and could go when the going was good.

Q: Did you get any reflections of apparently unhappiness with the head of USIA at that time, Joe Duffey?

ROMANSKI: Within USIA, he was regarded as a weak leader. He had come from academia and had not been tremendously successful there, it was felt. If I am not mistaken, he may have been President of George Washington University — he did not get very good press. For the most part, I think he was regarded as weak because he didn't enjoy a very close relationship with President Clinton. I had heard that he had only gotten the job only because his wife was an influential lobbyist. At a time when one's agency is about to be eliminated, weak leadership wasn't what was needed. USIA was facing its perennial foe in Jesse Helms. Jesse had his mind set on reducing the size and expense of government by eliminating unnecessary agencies. USIA was at the top of his list. I don't know whether Duffey ever tried to persuade him otherwise. If so, it was an effort that

none of us heard about. As soon as Jesse Helms managed to win Madeline Albright to his cause, USIA was doomed. We had no leader to defend us.

Maybe Madeline Albright wouldn't necessarily have made the same decision later on down the road. Once one starts down that slope, it is pretty tricky to change direction. I say this only because she agreed to abolish USIA in order to have good relations with Jesse Helms — at least, that was the rumor at USIA. Her relations with Jesse Helms deteriorated despite everything — despite sacrificing USIA. Who knows? Perhaps she bought herself a period of harmony and good grace which was enough for her. Perhaps she even felt it was the right decision. I certainly never got close enough to Madeline Albright to know what she was thinking — or thinks now. Few individuals are willing to admit mistakes.

Large numbers of USIS officers were very disappointed and disillusioned by this development. As the unification with State drew ever closer, many USIA officers who were eligible for retirement simply exercised that option. One of the benefits of the Foreign Service is the possibility of early retirement once one has met the basic criteria: 50 years of age with 20 years of government service. The criteria are not too difficult to meet.

Q: How did you feel about moving ahead with USIA by the time you finished with personnel?

ROMANSKI: Well, I could pretty much see what was likely to happen. Everyone could see that union with State was coming closer and closer. In fact, it took place during my next overseas assignment, which became my final overseas assignment — namely Munich. I was unhappy about the merger. Unlike the junior officers whom I had persuaded to go over to State, I knew that merger with State would not be good for what was left of my career. I was already senior enough in the USIA hierarchy so that I would not be able to reinvent myself as a successful State Department political officer, admin officer or anything of the kind. I knew I would have difficulty getting good assignments, let alone promotions.

In short, I knew that the reunification, as it was called, would likely shorten my career, which it almost certainly did.

Q: Well then, you went to Munich when?

ROMANSKI: I went to Munich in the summer of '96.

Q: And you were there until when?

ROMANSKI: I was there for four years, until the summer of 2000. In those days, and I think it's still the case, my assignment was for three years in a non-hardship post, but I could extend for a fourth year. I extended because I knew that it would most likely be my last overseas assignment. The reason I was able to get this assignment was because I had been working in personnel. One of the advantages of working in human resources is not only that one learns a lot about the system, but also that one can also earn, or arrange, a decent onward assignment for oneself. I was actually looking forward to this assignment because, after my very lengthy career as an assistant this or that, I was finally going to be a branch public affairs officer — the head of my own shop. Under the State Department, my position would become public affairs officer — without the branch. This represented a step forward — at least in terms of job titles.

Q: You were in Munich from 1996 to 2000. Who was the consul general?

ROMANSKI: The first one was P.J. Nichols, which was fortunate. One of the nice things about being in the foreign service by this time — it was well over 20 years — is that one might encounter officers one had known at other posts. I had known P.J., not well but slightly, from my posting in Warsaw. We hadn't served in the same place. I was in Warsaw and P.J. had served in Krakow, a branch post in Poland at the time. Nonetheless, we remembered one another. It was a good way to begin my last overseas assignment.

P.J. was there for just the first of my four years. He was then replaced by another State Department officer, George Glass, whom I had also known slightly. One of the ways that USIA assignments changed with unification is that we would now get much more involved in state visits. In a country like Germany, especially during the Clinton administration, state visits took place with some regularity. During my four years in Munich, I was involved in at least four presidential visits — at least once a year. Clinton was said to like Germany, one of our important allies, so he would find some reason to come to Germany every year. If I had been assigned to the embassy, I would have been involved to an even greater extent. At a branch post, we would not be called in if the trip were relatively brief.

Returning to my Berlin days, I don't recall that the President visited so frequently. Secretary of State Baker came regularly and, I would often have some involvement in SecState visits. During one of those SecState visits, George Glass and I were pulled together. I was in charge of a conference at a Berlin hotel for a German-American group — they wanted a friendly audience for the Baker speech. I had been given the assignment because I guess it was felt that, as America House director, I would have had a number of contacts in the German-American community. It was an exhausting event and the weather was lousy at that time of year. I remember falling ill but having to work with a high fever because there was no back-up. I was the only one who knew my site with Secretary Baker was coming. George Glass had been assigned to East Berlin but, after German unification, his responsibilities grew so that he was put in charge of the entire SecState visit. That was when I had the pleasure of meeting and working with George Glass for the first time.

Q: From a public affairs point of view, could you personify or describe Munich?

ROMANSKI: In general terms, it was a very positive climate, certainly more positive that Hamburg. Berlin was so large that it had been hard to get a handle on. In Berlin, the older generation who remembered the Berlin Airlift was pro-American, but they were literally dying out. Most West Berliners probably regarded us as irrelevant. This was in contrast to the East Germans who wanted to get to know more about the United States. Most

Germans country-wide probably felt that they already knew enough about the United States and didn't need to hear about it from an American. They already had their own ideas about us. East Germany was an exception since it was a more isolated country. In some cases, as the first American that the East Germans met, I had a certain exotic appeal. This changed quickly.

Munich was something of an exception to the general rule, because it was more pro-American. Germany has 15 states. Munich is the capital of the Bavarian state, which is the second most prosperous one. Bavaria is a rich state. It didn't have a lot of problems. The minister-president who headed the state was named Edmund Stoiber. He belonged to the Christian Socialist Party, the Bavarian wing of the Christian Democratic party and, as such, he was very pro-American. He would have likely been even more pro-American had he spoken any English, but he was of an older generation that did not always know English.

One of the nicest things about Bavaria for me was that, after so many years in Germany, I had at last found a post where my German was sufficient to the occasion. Bavarians are sometimes described by other Germans as, if they were being polite, “southern,” or, if they were being less polite, “lazy.” This meant that they didn't want to exert themselves by speaking English, although all younger Bavarians had studied it in school. I found that my German was by now good enough so that Bavarians were happy to speak German with me. As a result, whenever I had outside contacts, I could speak as much German as I wanted. It was a very healthy assignment for my German, which was as good as it was ever going to get.

I'm sure there were Bavarians who were not particularly fond of the United States, but our paths didn't cross. We would not have occasion to seek each other out.

Q: You never sat down to address an unruly mob?

ROMANSKI: No, but I did have an extremely difficult assignment, which occurred at the end of my first year. My original assignment was branch public affairs officer and America

House director. Due to the impending union with the State Department, the country public affairs officer in Bonn decided that we had to close some of the remaining America Houses, namely the ones in Munich and Hamburg, in order to save money. My house was one of the two that had been selected for closure. Only the America Houses in Berlin and Cologne would remain open, although their functions would change.

During my first year, I had to break the difficult news to my staff that about half of them would be fired. I also had to break the news to the Bavarian Government. Fortunately, since it had not been my decision, the country public affairs officer in Bonn graciously came down to meet with the Bavarian Government. I went along. I no longer remember how the news was broken to the consul general, perhaps by the ambassador.

The initial reaction to the news of the closing of the America House was that it promoted very positive feelings towards Americans — feelings that had often been quite latent. The average person hadn't set foot in the place in ten years but, suddenly when it's about to close, it becomes a valued property. The press in particular mounted a vigorous campaign. It would express criticism of the U.S. Government along the lines of. “How could they be so short-sighted and foolish as to close down such an important institution?”

As is so often the case and as the history of the German-American Institutes demonstrated, the Bavarian Government stepped up to the plate and agreed to keep the America House open. At first the Bavarian Government tried to convince us to stay, offering to give us the building rent free as well as other inducements. This wasn't good enough. The problem was that the America House was a large building and costly to run and staff. The rent was the least of it. The Bavarian State ultimately agreed to take it over and run it as the Bavarian-American Center (BAC). My senior FSN, a person who had been with the U.S. Government for over 30 years, was offered the position of director of the new Bavarian-American Center by the Bavarian Government. His salary was no longer paid by the U.S. Government; he was now on the Bavarian Government payroll.

Nonetheless, our relations with Bavaria remained close. There may have been a bit of tension from time to time with the consul general who may have tended to view the new BAC as the old U.S. Government cultural center. He was reluctant to acknowledge his lack of control after its change in status. As a result, he tended to be a bit more critical of the institution than he had in the past. For the rest of my tour, it became part of my job to mediate good relations between the former America House — now the BAC — and the consul general. This was not always easy.

I had lost about half of my staff with the closing of the America House. The consulate in Munich was a fairly attractive one, although not nearly as attractive as the consulate in Hamburg. There was, however, not a lot of room in the consulate. Moreover, all of the good space had already been snatched up by the other sections. We were stuck in a small annex of the consular section, the least desirable space in the Consulate. After having all the space in the world in the overly-large America House, it was a huge adjustment to be stuck in a small office. There were plenty of management issues for me to tackle.

Q: Had the new generation of German-Americans come?

ROMANSKI: If you mean a generation of Germans, I would say yes. Definitely. Younger Germans would see their future in terms of closeness to Europe, rather than to the United States. The official U.S. position was that one doesn't have to choose — one can have the best of both worlds. Nonetheless, perhaps it was considered more a question of who would be your best friend. Germany's best friend had become Europe. Some considered the U.S. a nice country, but much less relevant. They saw their future as Europe.

Germans have a lot of difficulty dealing with their recent history, given the German role in World War II. Many younger Germans are eager to call themselves Europeans rather than Germans. If you regard yourself as European, this puts a further step in the way to having a strong binational relationship with a country like the United States.

Q: I just read an article recently "Is Europe Dying?" and the answer is "Yes" in the article. It's really talking about the lack of population growth, trying to hang on to the systems of pensions and medical care that cannot be sustained. And the increasing influx of Islamic types. Was this at all a topic of conversation while you were there?

ROMANSKI: In terms of Bavaria, yes. By the time I got to Munich, the CSU and the CDU were in opposition to the central government in Berlin. One of the arguments the opposition parties used was that changes needed to be made, that the Bavarian State was better run and, therefore, subsidizing some of the less well-run states. Benefits were, by U.S. standards, very generous all over Germany. One of the benefits most cherished by Germans would be their six weeks of paid vacation. This was just one example of costly generosity.

Reforms meant biting the bullet and these reforms were probably necessary to take. However, I didn't see it as my role to tell Germans what was wrong with their country. I was happy enough when they weren't telling me what was wrong with my own country. By this time, I had spent enough years in Germany so that I felt I knew the country quite well. Many felt that the higher education system was crying out for reform.

If one were to compare the educational systems in the U.S. and Germany, Germany would come out ahead for high school education while the U.S. would lead in higher education. American high schools could be more rigorous. High school level education in Germany is considered quite strong, especially for the large number of students that go to the gymnasium. The problem is that universities are free, that is, they are supported by the tax payer. Conservatives and liberals would define the problem differently. Conservatives might argue that the gymnasia are graduating far too many students. Perhaps only 20 percent of the population should be qualified to attend a gymnasium and get a cost-free education. A more liberal person might have other solutions for improving the educational

system, such as making other educational tracks more attractive and potentially more lucrative.

Many things in Germany could be revised, such as the system of higher education. To finish my analogy, universities in the United States, although they are not free, are more highly regarded, generally speaking, than German universities. Many German universities have very large student bodies, over 100,000 students. An additional problem is that students in Germany spend many more years at university than their counterparts in the United States, which is costly for the state. Most American students complete college within four or five years. In Germany, that short a length of study would be a rare exception.

I would, however, disagree with most Germans about the disparity of degrees. Since the gymnasium was so rigorous — more rigorous than a U.S. high school, Germans would consider their gymnasium degree as the equivalent of a U.S. college diploma, a B.A. or B.S., which it really is not. When Germans graduated from a university, they would consider this the equivalent of our PhD, which it certainly was not. Germans enjoy this feeling of intellectual superiority. The systems were basically not all that comparable.

Q: I don't know, but I have understood that the German university level tended to be very much lectures. The same lecturer year after year. There is very little interplay with the professors. It's boring.

ROMANSKI: That is true. Many criticisms could be made of German universities. I never attended one, but from what I have heard, the system seems to be fairly lackadaisical. The onus is on the student to get an education.. There are no exams once one gets in. To get a doctorate, one will eventually have to write a doctoral thesis. There is also the so-called “habilitation” degree beyond the PhD, since the doctoral degree is deflated (by which I mean that it would not be equivalent to an American PhD in my opinion). To teach at a German university, one would have to get a second academic degree, sometimes called

a second PhD: this would be the Habilitation. We don't have that degree here: we have no need for it.

To get to the point, despite the boredom, despite the irrelevance, despite the frustration, if one persevered and got a doctorate, one would, in theory at least, be entitled to a civil service job. However, there are simply too many students and too few cushy civil service jobs with their lovely six weeks of vacation plus holidays. One can see how the system quickly becomes unsustainable in terms of benefits.

Even during my early years in Germany, there was pressure to try to tighten the system. For example, when I was in Hamburg, every German was entitled to a so-called “cure” for a medical condition every two years, which would entitle one to several additional paid weeks off work. There were plenty of abuses, so this benefit became more difficult to obtain.

Q: I was in Frankfurt from 1955-58. I was a citizenship officer. Apparently at that time, under the citizenship laws, if you stayed more than three years in the country of your birth, you could lose it. There was an exception, however, if you were getting medical treatment. Of course, everybody was trotting off to buy a hamburger or something and getting squirted with water or taking . . . terrible tasting water or something. We were tearing our hair out.

ROMANSKI: Right. As the years went by, the system got tighter. There are limits on how often one would be allowed to take cures. Most of the Germans I knew never took them. Certainly if one were ambitious and hardworking, which a lot of Germans are, one wouldn't want to take the six weeks, two months, half a year or whatever it would be, off to take a cure. Only a handful of the many Germans that I worked with over the years ever took cures, but cures are certainly indicative of the old entitlements.

Q: Were you picking up a feeling of unrest about some of this? I was in France too. "Maybe we ought to go to Britain or the United States to get a job" or anything like that?

ROMANSKI: The Bavarians were pretty happy with their particular state, which was doing well by German standards. In fact, the position of the Bavarians and the those in Baden-W#rttemberg would be that "the rest of Germany should be more like us. They shouldn't goof off. They should run their states more responsibly." Each of the states of West Germany had sister state relationships with former East German states. The Bavarians and many West Germans that I talked to were quite resentful of the huge amount of money flowing into East Germany to support the unemployed and to give them the benefits that West Germans had. One often heard discussions about how the reunification of Germany hadn't been done right and was costing too much.

Q: Well, looking at the time, this is probably a good place to stop. We will pick this up again and you are still in Munich, from 1996 to 2000. One question I do want to ask is about the immigrants, the Turks and others, and your impression there, and then we will move on.

Okay, today is the 6th of September 2005, the day after Labor Day, and we are all set to go again. Anna, we are in Munich, '96 to 2000. What was your impression of the new immigrants? They were mainly Turkish but I'm sure there were others. There must have been a lot of Yugoslavs too.

ROMANSKI: Actually, Munich never came across as much of a melting-pot city. I'm sure there were some immigrants, but there were actually many more in Berlin, which has a large Turkish population. This large Muslim population meant that when we declared the first Gulf War, the one that had to do with Kuwait being invaded, the Germans barricaded the America House with a row of large military trucks. It looked closed for all practical purposes. I and one of my German colleagues kept on working inside, even though I seemed to spend most of my time sorting mail. We were closed for a period of three

weeks or a month until the regional security officer deemed it safe to open. Berlin had many more foreigners, including a lot of people from Eastern Europe.

In Munich, I cannot remember meeting very many people who weren't German and even Bavarian. The Bavarians regarded themselves as almost a different nationality from the Germans. Munich would refer to itself as the northernmost city in Italy, rather than the southernmost city in Germany.

Q: I mean, did you get any feel from the events in the Balkans and Kosovo particularly? And I would also think you would have gotten a significant number of Bosnians?

ROMANSKI: I didn't see them. There must have been some camps for displaced persons from Bosnia or Kosovo. Refugees would be allowed — if not encouraged to stay — until a solution could be found. I think there was very little attempt made to integrate them into Bavarian society.

In Berlin, one would see people who did not look Caucasian, but in Munich, one wouldn't. One wouldn't see very many blacks. One would, however, read ever so often in the German press, particularly in former East Germany but it could happen in the West as well, that outsiders, people who looked different — blacks, Africans or people from the Middle East — would be beaten up by right-wing thugs.

The reactionary German party, the Republikaner, would periodically gain force depending on political and economic developments. This party was not terribly influential in Bavaria. It would never draw as high a percentage of votes as in the East or other parts of Germany where there were more foreigners. The main political party in Bavaria, which was the CSU, the Christian Socialist Union, was already quite conservative. I also didn't meet very many Germans from the East in Bavaria. Bavaria was changing but, traditionally, I did not get the impression that it wanted to attract very many Germans from other parts of the country. Munich had a more insular, more traditional, mentality than Berlin in this regard.

I would like to add a few additional points from my time in Bavaria. As I mentioned earlier, during this tour, we could look forward to a Presidential visit at least once a year. These visits, although possibly good press for the White House, were very disruptive of normal public affairs activities during spring, one of our busiest seasons. Nonetheless, the prevailing philosophy was to drop everything when the President comes, for what could possibly be more important than a Presidential visit?

I eventually learned not to schedule any important event, such as a conference, during May. One year President Clinton came to Eisenach to show his support for German unification. He was to address a large crowd in the main square. I had been given an assignment at the Ford-Opel plant, but after I had completed my duties there, all of us public affairs officers were to proceed to the square to help with the press. It was a beautiful sunny spring day — the weather was always lovely whenever President Clinton came. (In meteorological terms, he led a charmed life.) I was standing in the bleachers with the press when an East German reporter came up to me and asked in English what organization I represented, I said “the Embassy.” He asked me a couple of bland questions about German-American relations. Later that day, I saw myself on television identified as a reporter for NBC! Apparently, the East German's English comprehension was not acute enough to distinguish the difference between “Embassy” and “NBC.” I had some explaining to do to with my Embassy colleagues who may have thought I was trying to pass myself off as a member of the press!

Another regular-as-clockwork visitor was the Secretary of Defense, Secretary William Cohen, who would come every year for the Wehrkunde Conference, which was held at a Munich hotel on the first weekend in February. Colleagues from the press section in Berlin would come to help with the inevitable press transcripts. It was a lot of work, but one grew used to it. I would always experience a profound feeling of relief and gratitude when an important visit was over. I don't miss the excitement of working on official visits. I was no

longer so very young, not young enough to enjoy working fifteen days straight with no time off. The foreign service can be a younger person's game.

On another occasion in Munich, I was invited to a large reception. I can no longer remember the exact occasion. However, I remember going up to a popular politician and greeting him as if he were a long-lost friend. It was only after I returned to the Consulate that I realized that I had in actuality never met him, that I only knew him from television. At first, I was terribly embarrassed, but then it struck me that he probably didn't realize that he didn't know me either. As a politician, he was doubtless used to having strangers come up acting as long-lost friends.

I'd like to mention two more Clinton visits. One was to Cologne, where I was a site officer. The other visit was to Aachen, where President Clinton was given a German award. My site was the cathedral in Aachen, which was a very ancient one. It was the cathedral where Charlemagne had been crowned. As such, it represented an earlier version of European unification. In Aachen, I got to shake President Clinton's hand but, unfortunately, no one was taking photos (or if they were, I never got one) so I have no impressive souvenir of the moment. I could only tell that President Clinton looked like he was in a lot of pain — I think he was suffering from back pain at the time.

One of my German colleagues from Berlin had transferred to the Consulate in Munich. He liked to arrange large-scale conferences which brought together Germans from various milieus: academic, government and business. The conferences were usually quite successful. I remember that one year, the topic was the changeover in computers from 1999 to 2000, the so-called millennium bug that turned out to be something of a tempest in a pot of tea. It was, however, a good demonstration of a topic that would have wide applicability. We always recruited important speakers from the U.S. We worked in close cooperation with the Foreign Commercial Service representative at post.

My USIS colleagues had anticipated that most Germans would not want to come to the Consulate for programs — in part because space was so limited but mostly because security measures were already quite extensive. We underestimated the appeal of the Consulate to ordinary Bavarians, who otherwise never got to come to the Consulate except to get visas (which could also be done by mail). Our speaker programs were more popular than ever. People were not allowed to visit the library except by appointment. However, the library had already started to change its format from a reference to an outreach center.

I should mention that Bavarians eagerly flocked to the Consulate for the annual Fourth of July celebrations, which the Consulate thoughtfully scheduled on an actual workday. The invitations were as coveted as ever and American vendors such as McDonald's supplied much of the fare.

Q: We'll give you an opportunity to take a look at the rough transcript and fill it in. There may be some other things that we should talk about in Munich that we may have missed in the hiatus between two interviews. But where did you go then?

ROMANSKI: After Munich I came back to Washington and just had one tour in the department before my time in the Foreign Service came to a close.

Q: What did you do in Washington? This would be from 2000 to . . . ?

ROMANSKI: Until 2003 when I retired. I was working for EUR/PPD, which was the Public Diplomacy Unit in the Bureau of European Affairs. I was basically the Public Diplomacy Officer - sort of like a desk officer - for North Central Europe. Those countries were Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Slovenia: five North Central European countries. This was the only time in my career that I worked as a foreign service officer in the department.

Q: How did you find it?

ROMANSKI: I thought it was fine. It wasn't my first choice. I had actually hoped that I could find work in the former USIA building, now SA-44, near Voice of America, mostly because I knew more people in that building. However, it wasn't just that. I knew that the work would be more interesting to me personally because I had always liked working with exchanges, speaker programs and cultural work. Unfortunately, there were very few openings for Foreign Service officers at the time that I needed to find an assignment. My only choice was to get a job at Main State. However, I was happy to be working in an office where the majority of colleagues were former USIS officers — all now adjusting to the State Department.

Q: This is all quite new, the integration of USIA and the State Department. Overseas they had been integrated for eons. But back in Washington there were separate buildings, considerable distance, and all of that. Now there was sort of a forced marriage. From your perspective, how did you feel you were received? Did you find a different work ethic or different work approaches?

ROMANSKI: Actually, one of the things that surprised me at the State Department was that people were very friendly and quite helpful. On the other hand, they also probably didn't think that I was really very competitive, or much of a threat, because I was a kind of relic from the past. No one would mistake me for a future ambassador. One of the differences that I noticed immediately is that the State Department officers were much more careerist —at least quite a number of them. By that I mean that they were very willing to work long hours, to put in a lot of time on the job, to come in even when perhaps there wouldn't be a whole lot for them to do, just to look like they were eager, willing and able — and to be around should opportunity knock.

There was much less of this kind of attitude among most USIS officers. It would be very rare for a USIS officer to have to work on a weekend — perhaps if there were a crash

project or very important visit. Normally, this would be something one would try to avoid. I would not say that say that USIS officers goofed off, because we didn't. Overseas, we often worked harder and longer hours than most State officers. In Washington, overtime was the exception rather than the rule. That was one of the (some would say few) plus sides of a Stateside assignment.

One of the things that happened after consolidation was that former USIS officers had to work a lot harder on, and were much more involved with, both Secretary of State and Presidential visits. Our main assignment was handling the press that would accompany such visits. There would be less press on a SecState visit, but it would not be unusual for the Secretary to hold a press conference or a lunch with the press, Q's and A's, or something. On Presidential visits, the scope of the work greatly escalated. It was also not unusual for hundreds of members of the press to accompany the President on an official visit — sometimes two or three planeloads! I remember how astonished local officials would be to learn this — especially if they compared this to the press which would accompany their own head of state. I think once Tony Blair showed up at some official event with only three or four press members, about the same number as his security. Those days are long gone for our President. Everything becomes a production, even though the news value of such visits is usually rather insignificant.

President Clinton, for example, loved coming to Germany. When I was in Munich, he came every year. Most of the time these were considered state visits, since they were by a head of state. This meant that all of us, even I in distant Munich, were pulled into whatever location he chose to visit. Most often I served as a site officer, which meant that I was responsible for the public affairs activity at a particular point on Clinton's schedule. Of course, this also meant that one would have to arrive two weeks to ten days early, attend all the countdown meetings, draft up little scenarios of what might happen, have these ripped up by the White House advance team, re-write them, attend more meetings, meet with German planning officials, etc. Clinton was no fool and almost always came in May, because this was one of the best times of year to visit Germany. Depending on

how experienced (or rather not), the White House advance team was, one of our jobs was trying to get local and international press included in the larger events. The White House often preferred to treat press events as “exclusives” or privileged. This is not the best way to handle a large event, since the story is likely to get out anyway and leaves lingering resentment with the press, which is ever sensitive to slights.

When one did not have a particularly responsible assignment, it was almost like paid tourism in another city. One's hotel expenses were covered. There were other colleagues around whose assignments were just about as intense as my own so we had plenty of free time. One could have meals with colleagues from other posts. One could perhaps even indulge in the occasional bit of tourism. Free time grew scarcer closer to the actual visit date. On the day of the visit itself, or the day before, one would keep one's fingers crossed that nothing awful would happen and that the visit would soon be over. For those of us who felt conscientious about our jobs, these high-level visits were very disruptive. The order came and it did not matter what one had planned, one had to drop everything to go and help out. There was really no choice.

Exceptions were occasionally made for Foreign Service officers with grown children who were graduating from a college with the lack of foresight to schedule graduation ceremonies during a presidential visit. Perhaps one might be excused if one had booked a very expensive vacation like a cruise. In my case, I had the misfortune of having a wisdom tooth flare up right before a presidential visit. I could only get a dental appointment on the day I was supposed to arrive, so they leniently allowed me to arrive one day later.

Since I considered presidential visits so disruptive, I was surprised to discover while working as a public diplomacy officer at State that this feeling was not universal. To my surprise, some officers loved working presidential visits. When I was recruiting appropriate public affairs specialists to support a secretary of state or presidential visit to one of my five countries, people would call up to volunteer. Their offers were appreciated but not always taken, since I would try to recruit officers requested by the post, officers who had

recently served at post, or officers with knowledge of the language of the country. Although recruiting for volunteers to serve on Presidential visits was one of my most concrete assignments, it was usually not nearly the challenge that I thought it would be.

One of the other aspects of these visits would be working on Questions and Answers (Q's and A's) for official visits and clearing them with dozens of offices at State. These would be answers to questions that might be raised by the press in the country of the visit. It seemed like everyone at State wanted a little piece of the action. I certainly had never been familiar with the time-consuming, all-important clearance process before I came to State.

My main responsibility as Public Diplomacy Officer, however, was keeping my posts informed on issues and aware of any potential visits or problems. In the field, some officers have the impression that things are going on at State to which they are not privy. In an effort to minimize that kind of feeling at my operations, I would usually send out a brief daily report summarizing the staff meeting, highlighting press guidances and adding any rumors of which I might be aware. This report, as I understand, was popular and often circulated to the State officers at post as well, although I sent it only to the public diplomacy section.

One of the other things that I did that I would never have done at USIA was that I served on an Iraqi public affairs task force for one week shortly after the invasion. Like many task forces, ours was staffed 24/7. I took the graveyard shift for one week from midnight to 7 am. In fact, since I knew that I would be leaving in September, I likely could have gotten out of it but, quite frankly, I thought I should do my duty. I happened to be on duty when the whole Jessica Lynch episode transpired. I watched it all on TV — FOX seemed to be the network of choice, since that was a large part of my job — which, during those hours, mostly consisted of monitoring the situation. Occasionally, there would be the random phone call from some far-flung part of the world or an e-mail to answer but, mostly it was quite quiet. Sometimes we would have to work on guidances. Needless to say, the

Public Diplomacy task force was one of the first ones to be disbanded once our leadership realized that we were not so essential to the mission and that the Iraq war was was likely to go on for some time. A wise decision. Some of these task forces doubtless still survive. Hopefully, they are more essential than ours was.

Q: In North Central Europe, I imagine that Poland was the big one, wasn't it?

ROMANSKI: Yes. Poland was my largest country and that was probably why I got that particular assignment. Although my experience in Poland was certainly not fresh, I still knew Polish — not that that was a requirement of the job. I had also traveled to or visited most of my other countries.

In fact, the highlight of this assignment was that I was able to take a re-acquaintance tour to my countries as well as visit countries new to me such as Slovakia and Slovenia. It was especially interesting for me to return to Poland after so many years. The country had completely changed. Just a couple of superficial examples: the only constant in Warsaw was the ugliest building in town — a piece of Stalinesque architecture, the Palace of Culture — which the Poles have not gotten around to tearing down. Poles used to say that the best view in Warsaw is from the Palace of Culture, because it's the one place in town where one can't see the Palace. The breakfast buffet at the Hilton (or whatever hotel the Embassy picked for me) was the most bounteous I have ever experienced — meats, omelettes, smoked salmon, salads, fruits and desserts galore. In the old days, a half-stale roll, jam and dubious coffee would have sufficed.

I was also grateful for having had the opportunity to meet with my Warsaw relatives after so many years.

Q: During the time you were doing that, we are talking about the Bush II administration, aren't we?

ROMANSKI: Yes, we are.

Q: This was a period of great unhappiness in parts of Europe, certainly in Western Europe, about Bush. There was a feeling that he was ignoring other countries, going alone, accused of arrogance and all of that. Did you see any manifestations of that?

ROMANSKI: I was actually very fortunate. America was considered a great friend of Poland. After we declared war on Iraq, my countries — as opposed to “old Europe” rallied around the U.S., at least initially. They behaved better than the more traditional U.S. allies except for Great Britain. Germany and France were dead set against the war. I think Poland volunteered to send the third largest number of troops after Britain and Italy.

My countries were also moving in the direction of NATO membership and EU integration. All sorts of long desired foreign policy objectives appeared within grasp for them. Perhaps some of these countries might have viewed their participation in the Iraq war as a balancing act. They were trying to maintain their relationship with the U.S. on an even keel while moving forward on their relationship with Europe and the EU.

In any case, Poland had an ulterior motive. The Poles hoped that the U.S. would grant more visas to Poles. When I served in Poland, some parts of the country around Krakow had over a 90 percent refusal rate. This was a perennially sticky issue. I think Poles may have thought that there might be some kind of compensation, some kind of reward for demonstrated loyalty, that some kind of compromise could be found.

Q: You have law. You can play a little around the margins, but you have a law that has nothing to do with anything outside of obeying the law. And that's quite different than anybody else in an embassy.

ROMANSKI: Citizens of a foreign country don't necessarily accept that there is a law that we can't do anything about. I think the immediate reaction might be that one can do something about it. Not you or I personally necessarily, but you the United States, if we really wanted to do something about it.

Q: Yes. We get that from our own ambassadors too.

ROMANSKI: Our relations with Poland are very good. For one thing, there is a huge number of Polish-Americans who represent a large block of voters who may play a role in many national and state elections. This is not a body of voters that one might wish to ignore indefinitely. Nonetheless, there is only so much that we can do at the State Department. There is a condition that must be met before the U.S. can ease visa requirements as I understand the situation.

Q: Well, the whole idea is as soon as the people are who are given visas as tourists, a significant portion of them don't try to stay forever in the United States - and of course that isn't going to happen for while.

ROMANSKI: Right. When Poland is more economically developed, the requirement may be met. I'm sure there are genuine tourists, even as we speak, from Poland. As well as people who study in the U.S. for a few months or couple of years and go back. Not everyone would fall into one of these categories however.

Q: Did you sense a disquiet when you with your colleagues in the European bureau about all the development of the European Union as being in one way a good thing but in another way becoming a rival of the United States?

ROMANSKI: This is a hard question to answer because different people would have different views. The official U.S. position with regard to my countries, was that we were pro-entry into the EU. This would be true not only for my NCE countries, but also for stickier cases such as Turkey. We might support EU membership for various countries, but I believe that the official State Department position would be words to the effect that, “It is up to the EU itself to decide which country they would like to admit and under what criteria.” The U.S. might subject the EU to significant pressure with regard to Turkey, but we would recognize that it was ultimately not our call.

Unofficially, I think there may have been State Department officers who felt that EU expansion was not necessarily the greatest thing. Some might think that expansion of the EU would create more differentiation within the EU, a sort of second-class membership. In fact, Poland has its own problems with the EU because Poles feel like they are being treated as second-class citizens, as far as I can tell. Many of the newer members believe they have gotten fewer benefits than other countries that joined earlier such as Portugal or Ireland. I think that the U.S. hoped that we could continue to have good relations with the newest EU members and that they could perhaps even serve as advocates within the EU, i.e. more willing to accept some of our arguments, than some of the longer-standing EU members.

Q: I think one of the failings was, and please comment, that the members you were talking about had been under the Soviet block for 50 years. And they looked to the United States as being the power that kept true to the cause and essentially helped them gain their freedom from this. Whereas Germany, France and all, that was a long time ago. World War II was a long time ago. So there was more positive thinking about the United States among the newly liberated Eastern European countries.

ROMANSKI: I certainly think that was true for the Baltic countries of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. We had been championing their cause almost as a solitary voice even at the time of the Cold War, when it was very unpopular within Western Europe. Western European countries were afraid to irritate the Soviet Union by sticking up for the rights of Eastern European countries. This was certainly true for my block of countries as well. Relations with Germany, France or Italy varied with the time period and the country. Nonetheless, as a group, they likely felt that Western Europe could have done more for them, could have gone further and could have risked more. The U.S. was in a position to do more for these countries because we were stronger and located further away. We were more of a counterweight to the Soviet Union. We had many more weapons. The U.S. is also a

country of immigrants — we had citizens from those countries living in the United States. For a variety of reasons, the U.S. was rightly seen as a stronger advocate for their cause.

Q: That was the first four years of the Bush administration, a very difficult time for our relations with Western Europe. The Iraq War and the refusal to accept certain treaties and all that. Even though the Eastern European countries were more friendly towards the United States, did you find that this was a time to look and see that a lot of the bridges we had built to Europe were sort of crumbling?

ROMANSKI: I think that was particularly true in Western Europe. I was certainly very glad that I had left Munich before the change in administration. As I had mentioned, Clinton was very popular in Germany and had quite good relations with Chancellor Helmut Kohl and with Germany as a whole. In fact, it was even rumored that he spoke good German, although I don't believe that this was true. Certainly I never heard him speak a word of German despite his frequent visits and regular speeches.

The Bush administration adopted a number of policies. It wasn't even just the policies. I think the administration adopted an attitude that was widely regarded as arrogant, of not wanting to listen to outside opinions, of somehow knowing better. A number of colleagues at State would probably say that this attitude prevails even to this day. I don't know what your experience may have been, but I found that a lot of time even just listening to views that do not match your own is enough. One doesn't necessarily need a winning argument. The types of programs that USIA would do, and even the State Department sometimes — would often offer diverse points of view. This did not mean that, at the end of the program, one could write a position paper which everyone would sign. That was not the point. The point was to exchange views freely and to develop understanding and perhaps even appreciation for positions that were not exactly like your own. I have the impression that this kind of thinking is not necessarily characteristic of the Bush administration. I think they tend to have a more monolithic view — if one is not with them, one is against them. We

are back to an undifferentiated, all black or white world. No nuances. I'm not sure that this kind of thinking lends itself to good diplomatic relations.

Q: In your area, were there any crises?

ROMANSKI: There were small incidents, but not really anything that I can think of as a crisis. One thing I should say — I shouldn't say it was a crisis because their government and our government pretty much ignored it. Even though four of the five countries supported the U.S. decision to go to war in Iraq and all of them gave some support, even if it was very modest in the case of, say, Slovenia, the war was wildly unpopular in the countries themselves. Anywhere from 60 to 90 percent of the population felt that invading Iraq was the wrong decision. These are also countries that didn't necessarily have strong democratic traditions. Their leadership just ignored what the population thought. This was true even in Britain. The war was unpopular right from the start and Blair remained a staunch supporter of President Bush. I think the feeling of those making policy might be that gradually the public would see the light. And if not, so what.

Q: Well you did this until 2003?

ROMANSKI: Yes.

Q: And then you left?

ROMANSKI: And then I left.

Q: What have you been doing since?

ROMANSKI: All kinds of things. But nothing really substantive. I have not been successful in re-creating myself. At first I was hoping to get a WAE assignment like my husband has been so successful in doing, but I don't think I had the right kind of contacts for that, or at least none that ever developed. So I've been keeping busy traveling, doing some volunteer work, activity in the church, catching up on things, taking some courses, seeing family

more, seeing friends more, more time for hobbies. But I would be happy to do something more meaningful than I am currently doing, which is why I welcomed this oral history project offer as a contribution of some modest sort.

In conclusion, I would like to say that I am very happy to have served in the foreign service during the thirty-three years that I did. I think things have gotten tougher now for the incoming officers, and I'm not referring only to tours in Afghanistan and Iraq. I think the ethos of the diplomatic service has changed. Things are much more competitive and stressful now. Ours was a kinder, gentler time. I remember when I first came in, there was simply more time. I had time for lunch with colleagues. I even had time to take language courses. I had time to go out of my office and meet with contacts or potential contacts.

I think the new foreign service has become much more of a desk job, which would not be why I joined. Even the most outgoing officers have e-mails to answer, calls to make, reports to write, internal meetings and dozens of responsibilities to keep them from ever setting foot out of their offices. It wasn't that way in my day. I think the communications revolution — instead of freeing us up — has actually chained us.

One of the things I most liked about the foreign service, which hasn't changed, is that it was one profession in which one was constantly learning something new - whether it was a new language or culture or working with new colleagues and priorities. It was a way to keep fresh and alive. Change was built into the system and, most often, I welcomed it even though it meant that we could not all have equal opportunities for career advancement or challenging jobs. In general, I am happy with the path my career took. I worked in interesting countries on issues that I considered important with many dedicated colleagues. Perhaps I performed a few foreign services along the way. What more could one ask of a job? In addition, I got to see the world, or a large portion of it any way, on Uncle Sam's nickel. Living in another country for a number of years, acquiring facility in a foreign language, one manages to see and understand a country or a region in a much more profound way than one ever could as a tourist. Of course, there were sacrifices one

had to make in terms of family relationships, health issues perhaps, other opportunities, but I felt it was worth it. I think diplomacy remains a fascinating and vital profession.

Q: Alright. Well, I want to thank you very much.

Thank you.

End of interview